DHAKA SATURDAY OCTOBER 31, 2026

YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW

The Daily Star

SECOND EDITION



"The US has been dealing with Iran for 47 years, and I promise you that Donald Trump is not going to let Iran become a forever war."

US Vice President **JD VANCE**



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WR1 | WILL BHABADAH EVER BE FREE OF WATERLOGGING?

WR2 | CAN KHULNA BECOME A CITY OF OPPORTUNITY AGAIN?

WR3 | A MANIFESTO FOR BANGLADESH'S FUTURE CITIES

WR4 | EDTECH STARTUPS LOOK BEYOND USER GROWTH

Govt to recruit one lakh health workers in 3yrs

Three categories of grassroots workers to be brought under unified system

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

In a major push to expand grassroots healthcare, the government plans to create nearly 1 lakh health worker posts over the next three years, bringing three categories of field-level caregivers under a unified system.

The plan envisages a workforce of around 1.5 lakh health workers across the country, combining more than 40,000 existing health assistants, family welfare assistants and community health care providers (CHCPs) with the new recruits.

The integrated workforce will operate through proposed health and wellbeing centres at the union level in rural areas and at the ward level in city corporation areas. The workers will be designated as health and wellbeing assistants.

They will be trained to provide a common set of basic health services instead of working separately under different programmes and departments.

When contacted, State Minister for Health MA Muhit said that strengthening primary healthcare was a key commitment in the ruling BNP's election manifesto and that the plan to recruit 1 lakh health workers is a step in that direction.

The manifesto also pledged 80 percent of them will be women.

Muhit said the new recruits will be integrated with health workers currently operating under three separate management structures, a system that can lead to duplication of services, with multiple caregivers visiting the same household while others receive none.

"Our plan is to bring all these workers under a single primary healthcare cadre. Existing workers will receive refresher training, while new recruits will be trained and assigned specific duties," Muhit told this newspaper recently.

Under the existing arrangement, health assistants who are mainly responsible for vaccination work under the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), while family welfare assistants, who primarily distribute contraceptives, are under the Directorate General of Family Planning (DGFP). CHCPs, who provide medicines and services at community clinics, operate under the Community Clinic Health Support Trust.

Of the 58,000 available posts in the three services, 42,900 are currently filled, with about 15,000 remaining vacant.

Health ministry officials said the plan aims to ensure that health workers visit every household at regular intervals, at least once every two months, conduct basic health checkups and provide health advice, while carrying out existing responsibilities, including vaccination and the distribution of contraceptives and medicines.

NEW WORKFORCE PLAN

In March, the Prime Minister's Office formed a committee, led by the cabinet secretary, to oversee the integration of primary healthcare services.

Later, the Cabinet Division formed a technical committee comprising government officials and health experts, which submitted a report to the division, proposing the creation of 99,657 posts to support the integration, said division sources.

The Health Services Division (HSD) in September decided to follow the committee's recommendations though DGHS had earlier submitted a proposal to it in August, seeking the creation of 45,711 posts based on its assessment of primary healthcare needs, they said.

The committee recommended creating 99,657 posts of health and wellbeing assistants -- 49,945 in urban areas and 49,712 in rural areas -- in three phases, according to an HSD document.

In the first year, 9,989 posts will be created in urban areas, according to the minutes of an HSD meeting chaired by HSD Secretary ANM Bazlur Rashid on September 22.

Another 19,978 posts in urban areas

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

RECRUITMENT PLAN FOR HEALTH WORKERS

	POSTS IN URBAN AREAS	POSTS IN RURAL AREAS
Phase 1 (1ST YEAR)	9,989	
Phase 2 (2ND YEAR)	19,978	24,856
Phase 3 (3RD YEAR)	19,978	24,856
TOTAL	49,945	49,712





PHOTO: **RASHED SHUMON**

The Bhairab river in Jashore, once a vital waterway for the southwest, is now covered by water hyacinths as its flow comes to a standstill under the weight of pollution, encroachment, and unplanned infrastructure. Dozens of low-clearance concrete bridges, such as the one captured in the photo, render the river unnavigable for standard vessels, while severe siltation causes waterlogging in adjacent areas because the river cannot properly carry or discharge water during monsoon. The photo was taken recently near the Doratana bridge in Jashore town.

Rooppur Unit 1 begins test to generate power

Supply to national grid expected by year end

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Pabna*

Unit 1 of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant yesterday entered a key operational phase, beginning the process of generating electricity a day after receiving regulatory approval.

The process started around noon with a gradual increase in the reactor's pressure and temperature, marking the beginning of a series of tests leading to electricity generation, said Dr Md Zahedul Hasan, managing director of the Nuclear Power Plant Company Bangladesh Ltd (NPCBL).

"Unit 1 has been undergoing a systematic programme of operational testing," he told The Daily Star.

The programme includes testing and coordinating the reactor, primary and secondary systems, turbine-generator, electrical systems, instrumentation and control

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

LDC GRADUATION

Three more years to finish homework

Delaying the LDC exit is easy to celebrate. Now govt must justify it with genuine reform

ARUN DEVNATH

Graduation days are supposed to be proud moments. Bangladesh's graduation was less than four weeks away. Instead, on Thursday afternoon in New York, the country was told it could stay back for three more years, and the whole class agreed.

The UN General Assembly, without a vote or a single objection, pushed Bangladesh's exit from the list of least developed countries to November 24, 2029. Nepal, its classmate, got the same reprieve. Laos, which faces economic troubles of its own, is graduating on schedule. It has treated departure from the LDC club as a national goal for decades, and it relies far less than Bangladesh on trade preferences in Western markets.

In Dhaka, the mood is relief. Garment bosses had warned that losing LDC perks next month could cost billions in exports. Economists had fretted about dropping the WTO flexibilities that let the poorest countries subsidise exports. Bangladesh spent months lobbying countries, flying delegations to New York and courting the members of the UN's Economic and Social Council. It worked.

So far, so good. But anyone who listened to the whole meeting, not just the gavel, heard something less cosy. The extension came with a smile, and the smile came with conditions.

ANALYSIS

Start with the case for delay, which was perfectly understandable. Uruguay, presenting the resolution for the Group of 77 and China, ran through the shocks that hit Bangladesh and Nepal. It cited "the lingering effects of the pandemic, climate-related disasters, geopolitical

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4

Global leaders urge Dhaka to speed up reforms

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Global leaders at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) have urged Bangladesh to expedite reforms in key areas after granting the country three more years before it graduates from the least developed country (LDC) group.

The 30th plenary meeting of the 81st UNGA yesterday approved the extension for Bangladesh and Nepal, citing economic vulnerabilities stemming from domestic and international crises in the two countries. Bangladesh's graduation is now set for November 24, 2029.

The decision followed intensive lobbying by the government and the private sector. Businesses had pressed for deferment for the past few years, saying they needed more time to prepare.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

No reference to third country, Bay in talks with Japan

Says Humaiun Kobir

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

No reference to any third country came up for discussion during Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's just-concluded official visit to Japan, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Humaiun Kobir said yesterday.

"We didn't go there to discuss the Bay of Bengal because the Bay of Bengal doesn't belong to us only. We went there to discuss bilateral relations between Bangladesh and Japan, particularly economic relations.

"If you look at the joint communiqué, you will see that there is no reference to any third country. We will not discuss third countries in our discussions. That is clear. We didn't do that," Humaiun said in response to a journalist's question during a press briefing at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1



Traders and fishermen sort freshly caught hilsa at the Port Road fish landing centre in Barishal city yesterday as boats carrying the prized catch pour into the wholesale market from rivers across the region following the end of a 22-day fishing ban. PHOTO: **TITU DAS**

'We were chased, Tahsif jumped into Turag, I fled'

His friend Dip tells investigators, according to PBI

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



Tahsif Souri

The Police Bureau of Investigation yesterday recovered a motorcycle from Mazar Basti in Tongi, about three kilometres from the spot where the body of former airman KM Tahsif Souri was found in the Turag.

Investigators are yet to establish whether the black motorcycle belongs to the 28-year-old Tahsif or is the same one he was seen riding when he left home on Tuesday evening, as captured in CCTV footage.

The bike was seized based on information provided by Tahsif's friend Ahmed Shahriar Reza Dip, whom his family described as being like a younger brother and friend to him.

Investigators said the two visited Mazar Basti on the night he went missing.

Seeking anonymity, a PBI official involved in the probe told The Daily Star yesterday that Dip told the investigators that he and Tahsif were chased by some people in the area. While fleeing, Tahsif jumped into the river, but Dip managed to escape.

Additional Deputy Inspector General Enayet Rahman Manna of PBI's Dhaka Metro North told reporters after visiting the area that Dip had provided them with several pieces of information, all of which were being cross-checked.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

HALLOWEEN PROTESTS

French minister warns of 'very high' violence risk

Announces deployment of around 70,000 police officers

AFP, *Paris*

France's interior minister on Thursday evening warned of a "very high risk of public disorder" and announced the deployment of around 70,000 police officers for a new wave of protests this weekend.

France has been rocked by widespread anger over the rising cost of living and inequality, with nationwide demonstrations on October 17 degenerating into some of the country's worst rioting in years.

The Yellow Vest movement and student unions have called for a new day of protests today.

The demonstrations come in an increasingly tense political climate, with presidential elections six months away and far-right leader Marine Le Pen leading opinion polls.

"The day of October 31 presents a very high risk of public disorder," Interior Minister Laurent Nunez told reporters. Around 70,000 police officers and gendarmes will be deployed across France, matching the number mobilised a week ago, he said.



PHOTO: **PID**

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman returns home from Tokyo early yesterday, wrapping up his four-day state visit to Japan.

Binance hit by largest-known $6.3b crypto hack

North Korean group blamed; CEO blames 'compromised' engineer's laptop

REUTERS, *Singapore*

Hackers stole $6.3 billion from Binance, the world's biggest cryptocurrency exchange, in a record theft that analysts pinned on North Korea and said could shake faith in digital assets.

Cryptocurrency prices fell on the news, while Binance halted withdrawals and said it would cover the losses. About half the stolen assets were quickly frozen by stablecoin issuers such as Tether, Circle and the Trump-backed World Liberty Financial.

The bulk of the heist unfolded in around 20 minutes beginning late on Thursday and bore similarities to previous large attacks blamed on North Korea, according to US blockchain analysis firms TRM Labs and Chainalysis.

TRM said the attackers were able to order wallets that Binance uses to empty into hacker-controlled wallets, mirroring a 2025 heist at crypto exchange Bybit, which the US Federal Bureau of Investigation had attributed to Pyongyang.

Govt to recruit one lakh health workers in 3yrs

FROM PAGE 1

and 24,856 in rural areas will be created in the second year, with the remaining 44,834 posts to be added in the third year.

At the meeting, HSD decided to send a proposal to the public administration ministry for creating the first 9,989 urban posts, but the decision is yet to be finalised, a health ministry official said, seeking anonymity.

"We held a meeting with the Cabinet Division in this regard. All the posts may be created at once, but recruitment will be carried out over three years. We are waiting for the meeting minutes to determine the next course of action," said the official.

HSD also instructed the authorities concerned to urgently fill existing vacancies for CHCPs, health assistants and family welfare assistants.

HOW WILL THE WORKERS OPERATE?

Muhit said the workers will visit households at regular intervals with specialised kits containing equipment to conduct basic tests.

They will talk to residents, assess their health conditions and use available medical records to provide appropriate health advice, he said.

The workers will be equipped with tablet computers and connected to a central system to access relevant health information and coordinate services.

"This will help us turn into reality our commitment to bringing healthcare to people's doorsteps."

Muhit said administrative restructuring within the government is a complex process that requires coordination among various departments and the alignment of grades. However, work on the plan has progressed considerably.

"A high-level committee has been formed [by the PMO] and it has already held several meetings. We have broadly agreed on bringing the three categories of workers together."

Work was under way on their training arrangements, and recruitment would begin in phases soon, he added.

MIXED REACTIONS AMONG HEALTH WORKERS

Fazlul Haque Chowdhury, member secretary of Bangladesh Health Assistant Association Central Coordination Council, said the proposed integration had not been discussed with the workers' body.

He said they were concerned about bringing workers with different educational qualifications, pay grades and employment statuses under a single cadre.

Health assistants are recruited in the 16th grade with HSC qualifications under the revenue budget, while family welfare assistants are appointedin the 17th grade with SSC qualifications. CHCPs are in the 16th grade but work under a trust, he said.

"We have different recruitment rules and service structures. Unless the authorities share the proposed structure with us, we cannot understand how the integration will work. There are mixed reactions among health assistants, and many are concerned about the move," he told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, Ferdusi Akter, general secretary of Bangladesh Family Welfare Assistants' Association, said they had also not been consulted about the government move.

She said health assistants and family welfare assistants have distinct responsibilities, and it was unclear how they could perform the same duties.

"We do not know how this will work... We have heard the health minister speak about this in the media, but the authorities have not sought our opinions," she added.

When asked, several health ministry officials said top officials of all the departments concerned were involved in the process and that the ministry was unlikely to hold any meetings with the associations on the plan at this stage.

"It is a policy decision of the government, and public employees are bound to follow it. There is no need to consult them on this at this stage," said one of the officials.

Global leaders urge Dhaka to speed up reforms

FROM PAGE 1

The resolution said an extension was appropriate provided Bangladesh advances significantly on domestic reforms to address its persistent structural vulnerabilities.

It invited Bangladesh to continue implementing its national smooth transition strategy with UN support, to cooperate with bilateral, regional and multilateral development and trading partners, and to report regularly on progress in its annual submission to the Committee for Development Policy.

The Uruguayan representative, who moved the proposal on behalf of the G-77 and China, also urged reforms in key areas for a sustainable and smooth graduation.

The representatives of the European Union, Canada, and France made similar calls. The representative of Canada also spoke for Australia and New Zealand.

Bangladesh's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Irene Z Khan, said in a statement, "Bangladesh is graduating from the LDC category not because the international process calls for it, but because graduation is an aspiration of our people. It is a national imperative, and our government is firmly committed to achieving that goal."

Local entrepreneurs have called for lower production costs, faster issuance of trade licences and certification, adequate energy supply, more efficient land, air and sea ports, warehouses at port areas, skills development, and trade deals with major partners.

They also say bank interest rates remain high and the banking sector is vulnerable due to defaulted loans, making major reforms necessary.

Bangladesh has so far signed trade deals with Japan and South Korea to retain duty-free market access after graduation, and is negotiating with nearly a dozen other countries.

Nearly 75 percent of its exports are LDC-induced, and exporters currently enjoy duty-free access to 38 countries and trade blocs.

Product and market diversifications are needed as exports remain dependent on RMG, and both.

Bangladesh needs to reduce production costs and improve the business environment to make graduation successful, said Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

He also suggested diversifying the export basket, including within RMG and into pharmaceuticals and other promising products.

"Restoring macroeconomic stability will be extremely critical to protect export competitiveness. Persistently high inflation is pushing up domestic costs, causing the real exchange rate to appreciate against Bangladesh's major competitors," said Mohammad Abdur Razzaque, chairman of the think tank Research and Policy Integration for Development (RAPID).

He said securing a trade arrangement with the EU, Bangladesh's largest export market, should be an early priority, as should export diversification.

Bangladesh now has three more years to provide export subsidies under the flexibilities available to LDCs. Rationalising the tariff structure would support diversification but has received limited attention, he said.

Many priorities for graduation have been discussed extensively, and recommendations are already set out in the smooth transition strategy and other studies, Razzaque added.



PHOTO: **STAR**

DHAKA AIRPORT
a beautiful chaos

RBR



The crowd spilling out of the airport exit was innocence in its rawest form -- untamed, unpolished, almost defiant of the civility we expect in such spaces. It was less disorder than youthful abandon.

Families who had come to receive their loved ones returning after years abroad seemed locked in an unseen competition -- who would spot the hero first, who would hug him tighter, who would lift him off the ground in triumph. I silently thank God they have not yet learned to toss their hero in the air to mark his homecoming.

If only poor Odysseus had been met with such fervour at the end of his Odyssey. For our migrant worker heroes, the long, arduous journeys in distant lands are nothing short of epic voyages, filled with trials and transformations. Yet I struggle to reconcile the family's unrestrained energy -- the spontaneity that spills over and disrupts the quieter returns of those not hailed as heroes.

That hoard of people waiting tirelessly in the departure halls, unconcerned with rules or restraint, fractures the image of our nation and highlights the airport's inability to enforce basic crowd management.

The arrival halls resemble a theatre of confusion, with families spilling into every corner, queues dissolving into restless crowds, and announcements drowned beneath the din of voices. Congestion, poor signage, trolleys wedged in narrow aisles compounded by the trolley shortages, and idle e-gates compound the problem, leaving travellers vulnerable to delays and safety hazards. Officials admit that rising passenger loads place immense pressure on operations, particularly during peak travel seasons.

Customs adds another layer to the ordeal. Officers can stop you almost anywhere, with no clear line or managerial check to guide the process. You shuffle forward, hoping to avoid the harassment of having your suitcase pried open in public. The indignity is not in contraband -- there is none -- but in the spilling out of the private contents of a life laid bare before strangers. The only "offense" you might carry is a lily bulb or an air plant tucked away, a harmless souvenir treated with suspicion.

The inexperience reflects poorly on Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport's (HSIA) failure to maintain order in its incoming and outgoing traffic. HSIA, designed for 8 million passengers annually, handled over 12.72 million in 2025 -- including more than 1.13 million migrant workers and international travellers. In typical Dhaka fashion, making do with limited means, Dhaka airport has absorbed the lion's share of passenger growth, its strained infrastructure struggling to keep pace with steadily rising passenger numbers.

HSIA is a place where order teeters perpetually on the edge of collapse, and where the sheer volume of passengers overwhelms the fragile systems meant to contain. We wait, almost impatiently, for the new international third concourse with upgraded technology and modern management. Until that vision materializes, the airport feels less like a global gateway and more like a mufassil train junction -- chaotic, noisy, and bursting at the seams.

And perhaps, like Odysseus navigating storms and sirens, our migrant workers too must endure the turbulence of homecoming -- not on the high seas, but in HSIA, where every embrace is epic, every reunion theatrical, and every passage through customs its own trial.

MY DHAKA

Rooppur Unit 1

FROM PAGE 1

systems, as well as protection and safety mechanisms.

"As reactor power is progressively increased, the performance of major plant systems is monitored and verified under operating conditions," Zahedul said.

The process includes checks on turbine control and protection systems, the generator and related equipment to ensure all systems function properly before commercial operation.

Under the current phase, known as Stage C, reactor power will be gradually increased to produce steam, drive the turbine and generate electricity. Power output will be raised step by step while engineers closely monitor the turbine and associated systems, he added.

Officials stressed, however, that the start of the power-generation process does not mean electricity is yet being supplied to the national grid. Unit 1 must complete a series of tests under Stage C before synchronisation with the grid can take place.

The Bangladesh Atomic Energy Regulatory Authority approved the unit's transition to Stage C on Thursday, clearing the way for the power-generation tests.

Officials hope the unit will begin supplying electricity to the national grid by the end of this year.

Built on the banks of the Padma River in Ishwardi, Pabna, at a cost of $12.65 billion with Russian financial and technical assistance, the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant comprises two VVER-1200 reactors. When both units become fully operational, the facility is expected to add 2,400 megawatts of electricity to the national grid.

We were chased

FROM PAGE 1

"We don't believe everything he says outright. We are verifying each piece of information. Based on his information, we recovered a black motorcycle. But we have not yet been able to verify whether it is the motorcycle in question."

Asked about Dip's statement of being chased by people in uniform, the PBI officer said Dip had told the investigators that he and Tahsif ran in different directions after seeing two police officers.

"Nobody chased them. There are security guards at a nearby garment factory. Perhaps they mistook them for police personnel and ran. We cannot say who they actually saw without verifying the information."

According to Dip, the two separated sometime between 1:30am and 2:00am on Wednesday, but he could not say which direction Tahsif went, said the PBI officer.

However, Tahsif's father AKM Enayetul Karim dismissed Dip's claim that they had fled after seeing two people who appeared to be police officers, calling the claim ridiculous. He also claimed that his son knew how to swim.

"I don't think he has ever been to that area [Mazar Basti]. A defence officer would run away from the police is absurd. That is simply out of the question," he told reporters yesterday.

Earlier, he alleged that his son was murdered and his body dumped into the river.

Tahsif, former Bangladesh Air Force flight lieutenant, left his Uttara home on Tuesday evening and did not return. River police recovered his body from the Turag near Rajabari Ghat in Uttarkhan on Wednesday afternoon.

His name came to the limelight following allegations that he had circulated a video clip purportedly showing ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina leaving the country by aircraft from Kurmitola Airport on August 5, 2024.

PBI took Dip into custody from his Mohammadpur house early yesterday.

Jubaida Begum, who runs a tea stall in the Mazar Basti area, said she had noticed a motorcycle without a number plate parked there since Wednesday morning.

Police came to the area in a van yesterday morning and took the bike away, she said, adding that they later brought the vehicle back.

Around 12:30pm, Additional DIG Enayet and Additional Superintendent of Police Mostafa Kamal of River Police visited the area with Dip.

Asked why Tahsif and Dip visited the area around 2:00am, Enayet said the investigators were examining the circumstances.

"There must have been a reason. We are looking into it. We cannot confirm anything without verification."

He said the investigators were using technological evidence to establish when Dip was in the area and whether his statement matched the available information. Dip reportedly returned home after 2:30am on Wednesday.

Enayet, however, declined to disclose all the information provided by Dip, saying unverified details could mislead the public.

No case had been filed as of 8:00pm yesterday.

Talking to this newspaper yesterday, Additional Inspector General of River Police Md Rezaul Karim said they contacted Tahsif's family several times regarding the matter.

"They said they were considering it," he said, adding that the police would file a case if the family did not do so by today.



A farmer harvests paddy from jhum land in Rangamati. PHOTO: STAR

JHUM HARVEST

begins amid fears of poor yields

RIKORS CHAKMA, *Rangamati*

Farmers from indigenous communities across Rangamati have begun harvesting their jhum crops amid concerns over declining yields, which threaten their year-round food supply.

During visits to several hilly areas, this correspondent saw farmers harvesting and threshing paddy, while others were collecting and storing sesame, turmeric and maize.

Farmers said yields of jhum paddy and other crops have been falling for several years, leaving many families worried about their food supply.

Kyasinu Marma, a jhum farmer from Kaptai, said paddy yields had fallen by half over the past few years despite using the same quantity of seeds on the same plot of land.

Gayan Moy Chakma, a farmer from Barkal upazila, said jhum land was no longer as productive as before, with yields declining every year.

According to the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), jhum cultivation covered 5,000 hectares across Rangamati's 10 upazilas this year, with a production target of around 10,000 tonnes.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

Falling veggie prices bring relief to buyers



SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Prices of most vegetables have fallen in Dhaka kitchen markets as supplies of early-winter produce have increased. Over the past two weeks, prices of some vegetables have dropped by more than half.

However, tomatoes and new potatoes remain relatively expensive.

The trend was observed during visits to markets in Shewrapara, Kazipara, Ibrahimpur, Mirpur-1 and Karwan Bazar over the past two days.

Ranu Begum, 60, a resident of Kathalbagan, visited the Karwan Bazar kitchen market yesterday to buy essentials for her six-member family.

She said early winter vegetables were expensive even two weeks ago. Although she wanted to buy the seasonal produce at the beginning of the season, high prices had prevented her from doing so.

According to her, cabbage and cauliflower were selling for Tk 60-80 each two weeks ago, beans for Tk 140-160 per kg and round brinjal for over Tk 150 per kg. Radish was selling for Tk 50 per kg.

Yesterday, she bought beans for Tk 50 per kg. She also paid Tk 60 for two medium-sized cauliflowers, Tk 30 for a cabbage, and Tk 25 per kg for radish.

Private company employee Monjurul Islam was buying vegetables from a roadside vendor at Shewrapara kitchen market yesterday.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 6

Terrible toilets at Dhaka bus terminals

Women face inadequate facilities; poor maintenance add to commuters' woes

HELEMUL ALAM

Afsana Akter arrived at Mohakhali Inter-District Bus Terminal one recent afternoon to catch a bus to Mymensingh.

While waiting, she and her husband went looking for a toilet. But the only cubicle designated for women in the terminal's main building was occupied, forcing her to wait.

The terminal once had separate toilet facilities for men and women, but most of the women's section was converted into facilities for men around three years ago.

"I have been working here since the terminal began operations in 2006. There were separate sections for men and women. However, around three years ago, the women's section



was converted into a men's toilet, leaving only one chamber for women because the number of female users is comparatively low," said Mohammad Razu Mia, cashier of the toilet facility.

Afsana called the arrangement unacceptable.



Mohakhali bus terminal. PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

"It is very difficult for women. The number of toilets should be increased. We should not have to share facilities with men," she said.

During recent visits to Mohakhali, Gabtali and Sayedabad bus terminals, this correspondent found most public toilets poorly maintained, with inadequate facilities for women.

Mohakhali has four public toilets, none with a separate section exclusively for women. Most were dirty, with unclean toilet pans and urinals and foul odours.

Anannya, a dedicated women's toilet built jointly by WaterAid and Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) at the south-east corner of the terminal's entrance, was inaugurated on March 16. However, it was locked during a visit around 3:00pm on July 28.

A nearby shopkeeper said it usually remains open and suggested that staff might have been away for lunch.

At Gabtali Bus Terminal, only one of the four public toilets, built with WaterAid support, was clean and well maintained, with liquid soap and other basic hygiene facilities.

The facility remains open 24 hours and is cleaned round the clock by five cleaners, said cashier Mohammad Dipu.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

GURUDASPUR IN NATORE

Shakil killing puts BNP MP's family rivalry in spotlight

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

The death of Chhatra Dal leader Shakil Islam in Gurudaspur has sparked outrage and criticism of Natore-4 BNP lawmaker Abdul Aziz and his family, amid allegations that a rivalry between his two sons has divided local party ranks.

Local BNP and JCD leaders said the rivalry has disrupted party politics since the BNP government took office.

Party sources said Aziz chose his younger son, Mahamuduzzaman Shohag, as his political successor after being elected to parliament, fuelling tensions with his elder son, Nooruzzaman Mintu, who had worked alongside their father for decades.

The rivalry intensified when Shohag began preparing to contest the next upazila parishad chairman election, they said.

"Both brothers have formed their own factions to establish supremacy, and tensions have escalated recently due to this rivalry," said Imam Hasan Tipu, a former JCD leader.

Former Gurudaspur municipality mayor and senior BNP leader Moshiur Rahman Bablu said, "Gurudaspur has essentially become heavily influenced by the Aziz family, dragging the BNP's political reputation down just months into the new government."



SHAKIL ISLAM

Md Shah Alam, a JCD leader of the Bilchalan Shahid Shamsuzzoha Government College unit, said Shakil was a follower of Shohag.

Moshiur alleged that the family feud led to Shakil's death. However, Shakil's family did not blame the lawmaker's family.

Contacted yesterday, Aziz dismissed the allegations, claiming that a group backed by Awami League members was conspiring against him.

"These are false allegations aimed at defaming me and my family and destroying my political career. Those who failed to secure nominations earlier are now conspiring against me," he said.

Aziz acknowledged a rivalry between his sons but described it as a private family matter unrelated to politics.

Asked about Shohag's possible candidacy for upazila chairman, he said no election-related initiatives were underway.

Denying his family's involvement in Shakil's murder, Aziz said, "The victim's father named two attackers. An Awami League leader, who is currently living in the US, was behind the killing, but my family's name was dragged into the incident for political leverage."

SEE PAGE 4 COL 6



Members of the landless artist community, alongside Nijera Kori founder Khushi Kabir, attend the opening of "Peripheral Imaginaries" at Bengal Shilpalay in Dhanmondi on Thursday. The exhibition marks the 45th anniversary of Nijera Kori, a human rights organisation working with landless people, and features collaborative artworks exploring their lives, struggles, and cultural heritage. Curated by Mahbubur Rahman, the exhibition will end today. PHOTO: AISHWARYA RAIHAN

IN BRIEF

HSC, equivalent exam results today

BSS, *Dhaka*

The results of this year's Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) and equivalent examinations, in which more than 12.70 lakh examinees took part, will be published today.

The results will be formally announced at 11:00am in the meeting room of the Secondary and Higher Education Division, Ministry of Education.

Right after the announcement, examinees will be able to check their results simultaneously through their educational institutions, designated websites, and SMS.

Online, results can be checked using roll and registration numbers from https://eduboardresults.gov.bd and https://educationboardresults.gov.bd.

Results can also be known instantly by sending an SMS to 16140 from any mobile operator in the prescribed format.

Meanwhile, an Inter-Education Board press release said applications for re-scrutiny or reassessment of answer scripts by students dissatisfied with their results will start from November 1. Students can apply online until November 7. Detailed instructions will be published on the websites of the respective education boards.

Biman forms probe body on PM's flight

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Biman Bangladesh Airlines has formed an investigation committee to determine the cause of the technical fault that delayed a flight carrying Prime Minister Tarique Rahman and his entourage home from Japan on October 29.

The committee was formed following Biman's existing rules and procedures, the national flag carrier said in a press release yesterday.

Biman did not disclose the committee's composition or specify when the investigation report would be submitted.

It has been directed to finish the investigation as quickly as possible and submit a report to Biman's senior management and the civil aviation and tourism minister.

Further action will be taken based on the minister's instructions and recommendations, Biman said.

Flight BG377 encountered a technical problem at Japan's Narita International Airport on October 29, delaying its departure for Dhaka.

Attacks on minorities rise when democracy falters: minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Attacks on religious and ethnic communities in Bangladesh have often followed setbacks to democracy, underscoring the need for an inclusive state where people of all faiths and backgrounds can live without fear, Liberation War Affairs Minister Ahmed Azam Khan said yesterday.

"Whenever democracy has stumbled, different communities have come under attack," he said.

He was speaking at a programme marking the 75th founding anniversary of the National Council of Churches in Bangladesh (NCCB) at the CBCB Auditorium in Mohammadpur.

He said the government, led by Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, wanted to build a state for people of all religions, ethnicities and communities.

MP Anna Minj praised the NCCB's 75-year role in promoting unity, and communal harmony.

Bijon Kanti Sarkar, special assistant to the prime minister on minority affairs, also spoke.

Koren Samuel Sunil Mankhin presided over the programme, while NCCB General Secretary Rev David Aniruddha Das was among the speakers.

11-party set to hold long march to Kushtia today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Jamaat-e-Islami-led 11-party alliance is set to hold a long march from Dhaka to Kushtia today.

The programme will begin with an inaugural rally at the south gate of the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque at 7:00am. Top leaders of the alliance will address the gathering before the procession sets off at 8:00am.

The march will cover 410 kilometres, pass through Shariatpur, Bagerhat, Khulna, Jashore and Jhenaidah, before concluding with a rally at Shaheed Abrar Fahad Stadium in Kushtia at 8:30pm.

Roadside rallies are scheduled at Naodoba in Shariatpur's Zajira, Katakhali intersection in Bagerhat's Fakirhat, Shibbari Mor and Fulbaria in Khulna city, Murali intersection in Jashore, and at Jhenaidah bus terminal.

Around 1,500 vehicles and participants from 19 districts expected to join the long march.

Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Mia Golam Porwar discussed the programme schedule at a press briefing at the party's central office in Dhaka's Moghbazar yesterday.

Porwar said the alliance is organising the programme to press for seven demands -- implementation of the referendum verdict; justice for the July uprising killings; resolution of shortages of electricity, oil, gas and fertiliser; control of rising prices; an end to corruption, extortion and land grabbing; improvement in law and order; and an end to partisan influence in state institutions.



The hospital's paediatric department, comprising wards 8, 9 and 10, has 86 beds but admits around 260 to 300 children daily. PHOTO: STAR

3 to four children share a bed at Rangpur hospital

Overcrowding raises infection risks, strains medical services at the paediatric wards

S DILIP ROY, *Lalmonirhat*

The paediatric wards at Rangpur Medical College Hospital (RpMCH) are struggling to cope with an influx of child patients, with the number of admissions exceeding three times their bed capacity.

The hospital's paediatric department, comprising wards 8, 9 and 10, has 86 beds but accommodates around 260-300 children daily, forcing several patients to share beds or receive treatment on the floor.

During a recent visit, three to four children were seen sharing each bed, while many others lay on the floor.

The overcrowding has strained medical services and increased the risk of infections, particularly among children suffering from pneumonia and bronchiolitis, said Dr ANM Tanvir Chowdhury, an assistant professor at the department.

Hospital records show that 59 children died in the department in September. Authorities said none had measles.

Janufa Begum, 30, from Aditmari in Lalmonirhat, said her five-month-old child, suffering from pneumonia and breathing difficulties, was treated on the floor for four days before getting a bed, which the child has been sharing with another patient for the past two days.

"We are poor and cannot afford a private hospital. The government hospital is our only hope for healthcare," she said.

A shortage of phototherapy machines for newborns with jaundice has further complicated treatment.

Montaz Ali, parent of a newborn from Kurigram, said two babies were being treated under a single machine, raising concerns over infection risks.

Doli Khatun, nurse-in-charge of ward 10, said the ward was accommodating around 182 patients against its capacity of 40 beds.

She warned that the situation could worsen in winter, when pneumonia and other respiratory infections become more prevalent.

Meanwhile, a modern 100-bed children's hospital near the Rangpur City Corporation office remains only partially operational nearly seven years after construction was completed.

Shortages of doctors, nurses, other staff and medical equipment have prevented the facility from becoming fully operational, although it could significantly ease the pressure on RpMCH.

According to divisional health authorities, the hospital has emergency and outpatient services, a laboratory, an operating theatre and specialised units. However, inpatient and full-fledged services have yet to begin.

A proposal seeking 65 staff members was sent to the Ministry of Health in June 2023.

Dr Wazed Ali, acting director of the Rangpur Divisional Health Directorate, said three truckloads of furniture had recently arrived, but there was still no definite timeline for appointing staff or supplying medical equipment.

Country witnessing the rise of 'new autocracy': Nahid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country is witnessing a new autocracy after ousting the previous one, said National Citizen Party Convener and Opposition Chief Whip Nahid Islam yesterday.

"We ousted one autocrat, but now we are witnessing the rise of a new autocracy. However, we have committed to the people that we will defeat both the fallen autocrat and this new one," he said.

Nahid made the remarks at a protest rally organised by the NCP in front of the National Museum in Shahbagh.

Several thousand leaders and activists joined the rally, alongside large processions led by the party's Dhaka North and South City Corporation mayoral candidates, Asif Mahmud Sajeeb Bhuiyan and Nasiruddin Patwary.



Accusing the BNP government and Prime Minister Tarique Rahman of having no plan to run the country, Nahid said, "Tarique Rahman came to Dhaka from London with a plan for how to establish corruption, plunder, extortion, terrorism and occupation in the country."

Referring to ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina's announcement that she would return in December, Nahid said the current government would be unable to confront her. He called on the youth and participants in the July uprising to unite again.

He said rising commodity prices, robbery, power and gas shortages, politicisation of state institutions and deteriorating law and order had made people's lives miserable, accusing the government of failing to ensure public safety.

Holding Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed and Energy Minister Iqbal Hasan Mahmud responsible, he demanded their resignation, threatening nationwide processions.

On relations with India, Nahid said the government had failed to address border killings, unrest in the hills, the persecution of Muslims in Assam and West Bengal, and plans to demolish mosques in Delhi.

He also warned of renewed protests if the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty was not renewed on fair terms in December.

Senior Joint Convener Nasiruddin Patwary, Senior Joint Member Secretary Asif Mahmud and MP Mahmuda Alam also addressed the gathering.

Shakil killing puts BNP MP's family rivalry in spotlight

FROM PAGE 3

Aziz earlier announced Tk 20 lakh in financial assistance for Shakil's family, but the family said justice and security remained its priorities.

"I have lost my son, and nothing can compensate for this loss. I want justice, and I will not compromise...," said Shakil's father, Rabiul Karim, who also sought security for his family.

Nazrul Islam, officer-in-charge of the Natore DB, said police picked up two more suspects for questioning early yesterday.

Police earlier arrested Nooruzzaman, the MP's elder son, and placed him on a three-day remand.

According to police, helmet-wearing assailants hacked Shakil, joint general secretary of the JCD's Gurudaspur upazila unit, with sharp weapons at Chachkoir Bazarpara on October 14.

He was taken to Gurudaspur Upazila Health Complex and later transferred to Rajshahi, where he died on Monday.

PRAYER TIMING
OCTOBER 31

	Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN	4-50	12-45	4-00	5-32	7-15
JAMAAT	5-25	1-15	4-15	5-35	7-45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

অফিস স্পেস বিক্রয়

ধানমন্ডি ৮নং রোডে দক্ষিণ-পূর্ব কর্ণার প্লটে ৩০৮৩ বর্গফুটের অফিস স্পেস বিক্রয়।
০১৭০৪-১৭০০৭৫
০১৭০৪-১৭০০৭৬

পাওয়ার গ্রিড বাংলাদেশ পিএলসি
POWER GRID BANGLADESH PLC
(An Enterprise of Bangladesh Power Development Board)
Grid Bhaban, Avenue-3, Jahurul Islam City, Aftabnagar, Badda, Dhaka-1212 Web: www.powergrid.gov.bd
স্মারক নং- ২৭.২১.২৬০৪.৪১৬.১৭.১০২.২৬.১৮৪৬ তারিখঃ ২৭/১০/২০২৬খ্রিঃ

২৩০ কেভি বিদ্যুৎ সঞ্চালন লাইন চালুর সতর্কীকরণ বিজ্ঞপ্তি

সকলের অবগতির জন্য জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, পাওয়ার গ্রিড বাংলাদেশ পিএলসি কর্তৃক নির্মিত পূর্বাচল -বসুন্ধরা ২৩০ কেভি বিদ্যুৎ সঞ্চালন লাইন আগামী **০১ নভেম্বর, ২০২৬ তারিখ দুপুর ১টা থেকে ২,৩০,০০০ভোল্ট বিদ্যুৎ দ্বারা চালু করা হবে** এবং এরপর সার্বক্ষনিক চালু থাকবে। **এই বিদ্যুৎ সঞ্চালন লাইনটি নিমতলী মঠবাড়ী, স্নানঘাটা, ভাতুড়িয়া, ছোটপলাশিয়া, বাউথার, তলনা, ঢেলনা, মস্তুল, ভোলানাথপুর (২৪ নং সেক্টর) এলাকা দিয়ে অতিক্রম করেছে।** উক্ত এলাকার জনসাধারণকে বর্ণিত বিদ্যুৎ সঞ্চালন লাইনটির তার বা টাওয়ারের সংস্পর্শে না আসার জন্য বিশেষভাবে সর্তক করা হলো এবং টাওয়ারের সাথে গবাদি পশু বাঁধা, কাপড় শুকানো ইত্যাদি থেকে বিরত থাকার জন্য অনুরোধ করা হলো। বিজ্ঞপ্তি প্রকাশের পর উক্ত বিদ্যুৎ সঞ্চালন লাইন ও টাওয়ারের সংস্পর্শে এসে অথবা আরোহণ করে কোন প্রকার দুর্ঘটনার সম্মুখীন হলে পাওয়ার গ্রিড কর্তৃপক্ষ দায়ী থাকবে না।

মোঃ ফরিদ আহম্মদ
প্রকল্প পরিচালক ও প্রধান প্রকৌশলী (অঃদাঃ)
৪০০/২৩০/১৩২ কেভি জিএনডি প্রকল্প

Planning and Development Division
Khulna University, Khulna

Tender No : KU/PD-189/2017-1846 Date : 29/10/2026

e-Tender Notice No. 21/2026-2027

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP system portal (http:/www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of

Tender ID No.	Package No.	Name of the Work	Online Tender Closing and Opening date
1361872	GR17-KU/PD-463/2026	Supply, Installation and Commissioning of Ophthalmic and General Medical Equipment for Medical Centre of Khulna University (Re)	Date : 08-Nov-2026 Time : 11:00 AM

This is an online tender, where only e-tender 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 up to banking hours on e-GP system. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-Gp system portal and e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

(Prof. Dr. Kazi Saiful Islam)
Director (In Charge)
Planning & Development Division
Khulna University

GD-2630

Government of The People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Executive Engineer, RHD.
Road Division, Shariatpur.
☎ - ০২-৪৭৮৮১৫৩১৪
e-mail: eesar@rhd.gov.bd

স্মারক নং: ৩৫.০১.৮৬৬৯.৪৬৮.০৭.০০২.২৬-১৩৬৭ তারিখ: ২৫-১০-২০২৬

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (https://www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the below works.

Tender ID No	Package No.	Name of Work/Package Description	Last Selling date & time	Opening date & time	Remarks
1359943	e-GP-01/EE/SRD/2026-2027 Development WP-01	Re-Construction & New Construction of Flexible Pavement at 23rd (P) to 31st (P) km (Ch. 22+045 to 30+590m), 03 nos Bus-Bay and Construction of 12 Nos R.C.C Box Culvert at Gap No-23/1, 24/1, 24/2, 25/1, 26/1, 27/1, 27/2, 27/3, 28/1, 29/1, 29/2 & 31/1 Extension of 07 Nos R.C.C Box Culvert at Gap No-25/1, 26/1, 26/2, 27/1, 28/1, 28/2 & 28/3 & Earth work with Protective work of Shariatpur-(Monohar Bazar)-Ibrahimpur Ferry Ghat Road (R-860) under Shariatpur Road Division, during the year 2026-2027. (WP-01).	29-11-2026 16:00 PM	30-11-2026 14:00 PM	e-GP Only online tender.

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP portal. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and e-GP help desk (https://www.eprocure.gov.bd).

25/10/26

(Md. Monowarul Islam)
ID No-602245,
Executive Engineer (C.C), RHD
Road Division, Shariatpur.

GD-2627

প্রকল্প পরিচালকের কার্যালয়
"হাজী মোহাম্মদ দানেশ বিজ্ঞান ও প্রযুক্তি বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের উন্নয়ন" শীর্ষক প্রকল্প
হাজী মোহাম্মদ দানেশ বিজ্ঞান ও প্রযুক্তি বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়, দিনাজপুর।
Cell: 01713163329, Email: emdadul.hassan@yahoo.com, Website: www.hstu.ac.bd

Memo No: HSTU/Dev. Project/04 Date: 29.10.2026

e-Tender Notice-01(QCBS-eREoI)

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

Tender ID No.	Name of Works	Tender Publication Date & Time	Tender Closing Date & Time	Tender Opening Date & Time
1351716	Selection of a Consulting Firm for the Development Project of Hajee Mohammad Danesh Science & Technology University.	29-Oct-2026 15:15	15-Nov-2026 15:15	15-Nov-2026 15:15

This is an online Tender, where only e-Tender 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. All the other information of the tender is in Tender Document Sheet (TDS).

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd)

(Prof. Dr. S. M. Emdadul Hassan)
Project Director
Development Project of Hajee Mohammad Danesh Science & Technology University, HSTU, Dinajpur

GD-2629

Terrible toilets

FROM PAGE 3

"We ask users to leave their shoes outside and wear sandals provided by us while using the washroom. That helps us keep the facility clean," he said.

The other three toilets were poorly maintained. Those at Terminals 1 and 4 do not provide sandals, unlike the Terminal 2 facility.

None has a separate women's section, while several doors, water pipelines and lights were damaged or out of order.

Jamal Uddin, caretaker of the toilets, alleged that the city corporation had failed to carry out necessary repairs.

"Many doors are broken, and the water pump at the Terminal 4 toilet has remained out of order for a long time. Several lights are also damaged, but the city corporation has not repaired them," he said.

Sayedabad Inter-District Bus Terminal has four public toilets, two with separate facilities for women.

The WaterAid-supported toilets were comparatively better maintained, but attendants said men were sometimes allowed to use the women's sections when no female users were present.

"Only five to 10 women use this toilet every day, while 40 to 50 men use it. So when there are no women, we allow men to use the women's section," said attendant Shahida Begum.

The other toilets were moderately maintained but quickly became dirty as users entered wearing shoes. Several doors at the Cumilla Field Terminal were also partially broken.

Contacted, DSCC Administrator Abdus Salam said, "It is true that the number of public toilets we currently have is not enough. We need to increase the number, and we have already taken a plan in that regard."

Salam said contractors sometimes failed to maintain toilets properly after securing contracts through tenders.

He added that the city corporation had taken steps to strengthen monitoring and address cleaning, maintenance and repair problems.

A DNCC official also said the city corporation was taking steps to ensure proper maintenance of public toilets.

Jhum harvest

FROM PAGE 3

Officials said it would take another 15-20 days to determine this year's production.

In 2025, the district produced 7,437 tonnes of crops from 4,958 hectares of jhum land.

Mohammad Moniruzzaman, DAE deputy director in Rangamati, said soil fertility and productivity could be maintained if hills were left fallow for 10-15 years between cultivation cycles.

However, many hills in Rangamati are being cultivated again after just three to four years, while some are not left fallow even for a year, he said.

As a result, the soil loses organic matter and fertility, leading to lower yields, he added.

Jhum is a traditional farming practice among hill communities. Farmers typically clear land on hill slopes in March and April before sowing paddy, sesame, maize and vegetables. They harvest, dry and store the crops in September and October, with many families relying on the produce throughout the year.

KREMLIN PRESSURE

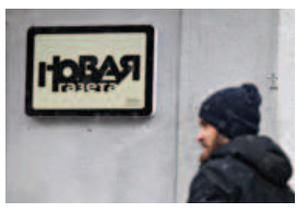
Independent Russian newspaper Novaya Gazeta shuts

AFP, *Moscow*

Russia's flagship independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta yesterday announced it was closing, saying it had been "killed" by state pressure after years of repression targeting its journalists whose reporting was critical of the Kremlin and its Ukraine war.

The closure of Novaya Gazeta -- one of the last outlets to openly criticise Russia's offensive -- marks a new low in Moscow's campaign against dissenting voices that gained speed after the Kremlin sent troops into its neighbour in 2022.

Since then, the newspaper, long considered a bastion of independent journalism, has seen its media license revoked, journalists and editors questioned, detained, and their homes searched.



It was also branded a "foreign agent" -- a label reminiscent of Soviet-era repression used to stifle dissent.

"Novaya Gazeta has been killed. Novaya Gazeta is ending its existence," editor-in-chief Sergei Sokolov said in a statement published on YouTube yesterday morning.

In the emotional video, Sokolov said that "the Russian authorities -- the Russian special services -- have forced the editorial team to end its work."

Founded in 1993 after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Novaya Gazeta was one of Russia's most reputable and renowned organisations reporting and documenting human rights abuses.

Mikhail Gorbachev, the last leader of the Soviet Union, donated some of his Nobel Peace Prize money to help set up the paper.

Several of its reporters have been murdered in killings widely seen as retribution for their work.

They include Anna Politkovskaya, who spent years investigating allegations of abuses by Russia's military during its campaigns in Chechnya.

Ukraine resumes attacks on Russian oil refineries

Kremlin says Kyiv ignoring Trump's call to halt energy strikes; Oleshky aid mission, evacuations begin

AGENCIES

Ukraine resumed strikes on Russian oil refineries after a pause with the overnight attack on facilities in Samara region, Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said yesterday.

Three oil refineries and one gas-chemical complex in the region were hit, and one of them was slightly damaged, he said.

Ukraine was ignoring US President's Donald Trump request to stop attacks on Russian oil refineries, the Kremlin said earlier yesterday.

The Wall Street Journal reported on Thursday that Ukraine's military has paused its strikes on Russian oil refineries after pressure from Trump, citing people with knowledge of the operations.

The unofficial pause is expected to last until after the US midterm elections and potentially deeper into November, it added. Russia has, however, stepped up attacks on Ukrainian energy and civilian infrastructure.

The current Ukrainian attacks on oil refineries do not jeopardise the planned trilateral negotiations on peace in Ukraine, Russia's agency Interfax cites Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov as saying.

Meanwhile, the evacuation of stranded residents in Oleshky, a ravaged Ukrainian frontline city under Russian occupation, began yesterday as part of a US-brokered ceasefire.



Local residents wait next to buses ahead of their evacuation in Oleshky, Kherson region, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine, yesterday. PHOTO: **AFP**

"Evacuation and distribution of humanitarian aid have begun," Ukrainian negotiator David Arakhamia said on social media. The relief operation for the town of Oleshky was made possible by a ceasefire brokered by US first lady Melania Trump.

More than 200,000 people remain without power in Ukraine's central Dnipropetrovsk region following Russian attacks, authorities said yesterday, a day after a deadly Russian drone strike on a train station there, reports AFP.

Russia's defence ministry meanwhile said that its air defence systems had overnight shot down more than 1,000 Ukrainian drones across Russian regions.

Ukraine's air force said Russia had used ballistic missiles and drones to attack several regions overnight, including Dnipropetrovsk, causing a widespread blackout in Dnipro city.

Russia still hopes that Trump can pressure Kyiv into accepting a deal that meets many of Moscow's conditions, such as full Russian control of Ukraine's Donbas region and a bar on Ukraine joining Nato.

NOV 3 MIDTERMS

Surging costs of living top US voter concerns

AFP, *Fort Lauderdale*

Soaring prices for gas, medicine and other cost of living essentials are preoccupying Americans as they start to cast their ballots ahead of next week's midterm elections.

A whopping 84 percent of voters who have cast their ballots early listed the economy as their biggest concern this election cycle, according to a recent Pew Research Center survey.

Kyler Daugherty, a 43-year-old health care worker, summed up the sentiment as he filled up his gas tank in Fort

US gas prices rose 9.1 percent in September alone, according to official figures, a headache for residents in a state like Florida

Lauderdale, Florida. "It's ridiculous. I mean, everything's gone up, from food to transportation to gas prices," he told AFP.

Fuel costs have skyrocketed around the world since the United States and Israel launched strikes on Iran in February. US gas prices rose 9.1 percent in September alone, according to official figures, a headache for residents in a state like Florida, where most people rely on cars to get around.

"It affects transportation...it affects everything," Matthew Moore, a 63-year-old attorney, said after he cast his ballot early. "We transport a lot by truck. Air prices have gone up. My tickets home for Christmas have doubled since last year," he said.



Students march behind a banner during a demonstration in Turin, Italy, yesterday, as part of a nationwide day of strikes and protests demanding more funding for schools and greater support for housing. PHOTO: **AFP**

IN BRIEF

Bhutan glacial lake outburst triggers flood

No injuries reported

REUTERS, *Kathmandu*

A flood caused by the Shintaphu glacial lake bursting its banks has washed away infrastructure at the Gasa Tshachu natural hot springs in Bhutan, media reports said yesterday.



No injuries or loss of life have been reported, BBS said.

The hot springs at Gasa Tshachu are a major tourist attraction in the northern part of the country that is nestled between India and China.

BBS reported the extent of damage from the late night flash flood was not known. Two bailey bridges – bridges built in portable sections – may have been washed away.

9m refugees need extra help: UN

AFP, *Geneva*

The UN refugee agency yesterday said nine million people would need extra help to get through the coming winter in Ukraine, Syria, Lebanon and Afghanistan.

Launching a fundraising appeal, the UNHCR said it hoped to raise at least $50 million for winter support -- $3 million more than it raised last year.

"Resources are scarce and costs are spiralling just as winter looms in the northern hemisphere," said Dominique Hyde, the agency's external relations director. "Millions in these fragile countries risk facing ....enough protection from cold."

The agency said winter needs were vast across four countries, where millions were contending with fuel shortages for heating and cooking.

Trump opened 'floodgate to freedom' for Venezuela

Says Machado

AFP, *Caracas*

Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado on Thursday thanked the government of US President Donald Trump for opening the "floodgate to freedom" by capturing president Nicolas Maduro in January.

The Nobel Peace Prize laureate spoke at a press conference in Caracas after returning to Venezuela from 10 months in exile.

"Thanks to their vision, their courage, and their action on January 3, the floodgate to freedom has been opened," Machado said, naming Trump, his administration and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

She was more critical of a massive oil deal struck between Washington and Caracas.

"This agreement does not reflect the levels of transparency that Venezuelan society wants," she said of the accord that will see Venezuela hand over 20 percent of its vast oil reserves to the US.

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
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তারিখ: ১৩ কার্তিক ১৪৩৩ / ২৯ অক্টোবর ২০২৬

গণবিজ্ঞপ্তি

স্থানীয় সরকার (সিটি কর্পোরেশন) প্রতিষ্ঠা বিধিমালা, ২০১০ এর ৫ ধারার উপধারা ১ এর প্রদত্ত ক্ষমতাবলে আমি মাজহারুল ইসলাম, জেলা প্রশাসক, ফরিদপুর, ফরিদপুর পৌরসভার বিদ্যমান এলাকায় সিটি কর্পোরেশন প্রতিষ্ঠার লক্ষ্যে নিম্ন তফসিল বর্ণিত এলাকা সিটি কর্পোরেশন ঘোষণার বিষয়ে সংশ্লিষ্ট এলাকার অধিবাসীগণের নিকট হতে লিখিত মতামত/আপত্তি আহবান করছি। উল্লিখিত বিষয়ে কারো কোন মতামত/আপত্তি থাকলে এ বিজ্ঞপ্তি প্রকাশের তারিখ হতে অনূর্ধ্ব ০১ (এক) মাসের মধ্যে নিম্নস্বাক্ষরকারীর নিকট দাখিল করতে হবে।

প্রস্তাবিত সিটি কর্পোরেশন এলাকার তফসিল

ক্রমিক নং	মৌজার নাম	জে.এল নং	দাগ নং
০১.	মাজচর কোওরপুর	১৮ বি.এস	৮৬৭৭-৮৭৩০, ৮৮৬০, ৯৪২০-৯৪৮১
০২.	পারচর	১৯ বি.এস	১-৭৬৬, ১৫০১-২৪১৪
০৩.	শ্যামসুন্দরপুর	২০ বি.এস	১-৮১১
০৪.	গোবিন্দপুর	২১ বি.এস	৩৫০১-৪৬১১
০৫.	মহারাজপুর	৪০ বি.এস	১-১১১৮
০৬.	পশ্চিম গঙ্গাবর্দী	৪১ বি.এস	১-১০৪৯, ১৫০১-২৫৩১, ৩০০১-৩৬১৬
০৭.	পূর্ব্ব গঙ্গাবরদী	৪২ বি.এস	১-৫৩৫, ১০০১-২১৪৯, ৩০০১-৩৩৮৩
০৮.	সোনপচা	৪৩ বি.এস	১-২১৭
০৯.	মৃগী	৪৪ বি.এস	১-৭৩২, ২০০১-২৮১১
১০.	তাম্বুলখানা	৮০ বি.এস	৮০১-৯১৬
১১.	সমসপুর	৮১ বি.এস	১-১৫০, ৪৪০-৫২৫
১২.	মুরারীদহ	৮২ বি.এস	১-৬৬৭, ২০০১-২১৪৬, ২১৪৮-৩১৫১, ৩১৫৩-৩৩০৭
১৩.	কাফুরা	৯৭ বি.এস	১-৬৬০, ২০০১-২৪৬৫
১৪.	পশোড়া	৯৮ বি.এস	৩০০১-৩১৮৪, ৩১৮৬
১৫.	কৈজুরী	৯৯ বি.এস	১-৬২৯, ৬৩১-১৪৪৮, ৪৫০১-৪৮৪৫
১৬.	কবিরপুর	১০০ বি.এস	১-৯৪৬
১৭.	ডোমরাকান্দি	১০১ বি.এস	১-৭১৮, ২০০১-২৭৩৩
১৮.	বদরপুর	১০২ বি.এস	১-৪৮৪
১৯.	গোয়ালচামট	১০৩ বি.এস	সম্পূর্ণ মৌজা
২০.	হাবেলী রাজাপুর	১০৪ বি.এস	সম্পূর্ণ মৌজা
২১.	মামুদপুর	১০৫ বি.এস	১-৬৪, ২০১, ২০৩-২২৩, ২২৫-৩০৭, ৩০৯-৩২৯, ৪০১-৫৭৬, ৮০২-৯০২, ৯০৩-৯৬৯, ৯৭১-৯৯৬, ১১০১-১২১৩, ১৩০১-১৩৯১, ১৫০১-১৫৮৫, ১৫৯০-১৬০১
২২.	দেওড়া	১০৬ বি.এস	১-২০৩
২৩.	বিলমামুদপুর	১০৭ বি.এস	১-১০৪৩, ২০০১-৩০৪৫, ৪০০১-৪৯৬৫, ৬০০১-৬৭৬৩, ৮০০১-৮৮১৪
২৪.	সাদিপুর	১১০ বি.এস	১-১০৪০, ২০০১-২০০৮
২৫.	ভাজনডাঙ্গা	১১১ বি.এস	১-৪৬৫, ৫০১-৯০৮, ৯১০-১০১২
২৬.	টেপাখোলা	১১৪ বি.এস	সম্পূর্ণ মৌজা
২৭.	চর পশ্চিম টেপাখোলা	১১৫ বি.এস	১-২০, ২৪-৩৪, ৪৪-৬২, ৭৮, ৭৯, ৮১-৮৪, ৯০-৯৩, (আংশিক-৬৩, ৬৮-৭৭, ৮০, ১০৫), ২০১-২২৩, ৬৩৫-৬৪৫, ১৫০১-১৫৬২, ১৮০১-১৯৫৮, ২১০১-২১৯৫, ২৪০১-২৪৯৬, ২৭০১-২৭১০, ২৭১২-২৯৩৯, ৩১০১-৩১৭৪, ৩১৭৭-৩২৮২
২৮.	কমলাপুর	১১৬ বি.এস	সম্পূর্ণ মৌজা
২৯.	খাবাসপুর	১১৭ বি.এস	সম্পূর্ণ মৌজা
৩০.	ফরিদপুর	১১৮ বি.এস	সম্পূর্ণ মৌজা
৩১.	হাবেলী গোপালপুর	১১৯ বি.এস	সম্পূর্ণ মৌজা
৩২.	গুহলক্ষীপুর	১২০ বি.এস	সম্পূর্ণ মৌজা
৩৩.	পশ্চিম রামকান্তপুর	১২২ বি.এস	২১৮, ২৬৮-২৭৯
৩৪.	বেরহিমপুর	১২৩ বি.এস	১-১৬২
৩৫.	আদমপুর	১২৪ বি.এস	১৫৬-৩৫৪, ৫০১-৫১৮, ৫২১-৫২২, ৫২৪-৫২৯, ৫৩১-৯৭৭
৩৬.	সতেরখাদা	১২৫ বি.এস	১-৮৮, ৯১-৩৯৬
৩৭.	আলীপুর	১২৬ বি.এস	সম্পূর্ণ মৌজা
৩৮.	শোভারামপুর	১২৭ বি.এস	সম্পূর্ণ মৌজা
৩৯.	রঘুনন্দনপুর	১২৮ বি.এস	সম্পূর্ণ মৌজা
৪০.	কোমরপুর	১২৯ বি.এস	সম্পূর্ণ মৌজা
৪১.	ধুলদী গোবিন্দপুর	১৩২ বি.এস	১৮৮-২৮৭, ৩২৪-৪৫৬, ৪৫৮-৪৬১

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Make healthcare affordable for all

Govt must improve public healthcare to reduce out-of-pocket expenditure

It is deeply concerning that seeking medical treatment has become a source of financial distress for many people in the country. A recent government study has found that out-of-pocket (OOP) healthcare expenditure pushed 1.08 crore people, or 6.4 percent of the population, below the poverty line in 2022. According to the study, 41.7 percent of the population faced financial hardship due to medical expenses that year, up from 28.2 percent in 2005. These findings once again highlight the serious failure of our public healthcare system to provide citizens with affordable access to essential medical services.

This increase in OOP expenditure comes despite a substantial decline in the national poverty rate, from 40 percent in 2005 to 18.7 percent in 2022. Understandably, the poorest households bear the greatest burden, with 90.8 percent of people in the lowest income group facing financial hardship due to medical expenses, compared with 13.6 percent among the wealthiest. Rural residents are also disproportionately affected, with 47.9 percent facing financial hardship, against 28.2 percent in urban areas. A recent assessment found that the measles outbreak pushed thousands of poor families into debt, with nearly 9 in 10 affected households forced to borrow for treatment. The dengue outbreak has also placed many families under severe financial strain.

Healthcare costs are rising faster than household incomes: between 2016 and 2022, household incomes increased by 38 percent, while healthcare expenditure rose by 43 percent. Medicines, diagnostic tests, hospitalisation and consultation fees account for a substantial share of these expenses.

The reasons behind this growing burden are not difficult to identify. Healthcare costs are rising faster than household incomes: between 2016 and 2022, household incomes increased by 38 percent, while healthcare expenditure rose by 43 percent. Medicines, diagnostic tests, hospitalisation and consultation fees account for a substantial share of these expenses. They can be particularly devastating for people who need regular treatment and medication. Another worrying trend is the growing reliance on pharmacies for treatment. The proportion of people turning to pharmacies for healthcare rose from 32.5 percent in 2016 to 55.4 percent in 2022. This suggests that many people are either unable to access proper medical care or are turning to pharmacies because public facilities are inadequate. Meanwhile, the share of patients seeking inpatient treatment at government hospitals has declined, while reliance on private facilities has increased, further adding to the financial burden.

Our long-standing failure to strengthen primary healthcare is at the root of these problems. Understaffed public hospitals, inadequate upazila health complexes, and insufficient investment in community-level services compel many patients to seek treatment elsewhere, often at much higher costs. The latest study raises concerns that poorer households are no longer benefiting adequately from public healthcare spending.

The government must therefore reform the healthcare sector and ensure that public funds reach those who need them most. Better monitoring, transparency and accountability in the allocation and use of healthcare resources are essential to curb irregularities and corruption in the sector. At the same time, public hospitals and primary healthcare facilities must be adequately staffed and equipped, with reliable supplies of essential medicines and diagnostic services, so that patients are not forced to pay for them elsewhere.

Don't turn fruits into a luxury

Excessive import duties are taking fruits out of ordinary people's reach

The prices of fruits in the country have risen to a point where even middle-class families are struggling to afford them. For low-income households, these essential sources of vital nutrients have increasingly become a luxury rather than part of a balanced diet. A recent report by *Prothom Alo*, citing findings from the Bangladesh Trade and Tariff Commission (BTTC), describes how successive increases in import duties and taxes have contributed to this situation. It is troubling that the government effectively treats fresh fruits as a luxury, prioritising revenue collection over people's nutritional needs.

According to the report, the combined tax burden on imported fruits, such as apples, oranges, grapes, pears and pomegranates, has increased from 89 percent in FY2020-21 to 122 percent in FY2026-27. For instance, in Dhaka, a kilogram of the "malta" oranges that cost Tk 120-150 per kg in July 2020 sold for Tk 420-450 in September 2026. Other imported fruits have witnessed similarly steep price increases.

Unfortunately, locally grown fruits offer little relief. Four Sagor bananas, which cost Tk 20-25 in July 2020, now sell for Tk 40-50. A kilogram of guavas costs around Tk 120, while good-quality ripe papayas sell for around Tk 120 per kilogram. For low-income families, even these relatively common fruits are becoming difficult to afford. Market analysts suggest that reduced imports of foreign fruits have weakened competition, allowing domestic fruit sellers to charge higher prices. However, rising production, transportation and marketing costs also deserve scrutiny. What makes the situation particularly disturbing is that government revenue from fruit imports increased from Tk 2,570 crore in FY2020-21 to Tk 5,938 crore in FY2025-26, even as import volumes shrank from 800,000 to 571,000 tonnes. Although the depreciation of the taka has also contributed to higher prices, the tax burden remains a major factor.

The World Health Organization recommends a daily intake of at least 400 grams of fruits and vegetables combined. In Bangladesh, the average per capita fruit consumption stood at just 95.4 grams in 2022. Although the latest update regarding fruit consumption is not available as no Household Income and Expenditure Survey has been conducted since 2022, one could safely assume that it has declined. The government must promptly act on the BTTC's recommendation to reduce import duties on fruits. Meanwhile, authorities must investigate the factors driving domestic fruit prices, improve supply chains, reduce unnecessary intermediary costs, and strengthen market monitoring. Ensuring affordable fruits, whether imported or locally grown, must be treated as a public health priority.

We must use the LDC extension for lasting economic gains

MACRO MIRROR



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FAHMIDA KHATUN

On Thursday, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) approved a three-year extension for Bangladesh to prepare for graduation from the Least Developed Country (LDC) category, rescheduling it for November 24, 2029. Now the country has more time to strengthen its preparations to continue retaining international support and trade benefits that LDCs get. However, time extension alone cannot overcome the economy's weaknesses if it doesn't employ targeted, tough measures. The country must use this opportunity to implement meaningful reforms.

The Committee for Development Policy (CDP) reviews the LDCs' progress every three years against three criteria: per capita gross national income, the Human Assets Index (HAI), and the Economic and Environmental Vulnerability Index (EVI). A country must meet the required thresholds in two consecutive reviews to be considered for graduation. Bangladesh first met the graduation criteria in 2018, and again in 2021. The CDP subsequently recommended Bangladesh for graduation. Given the economic and development losses caused by the Covid pandemic, the UN granted Bangladesh, Lao PDR and Nepal an exceptional five-year preparatory period to prepare for a smooth transition. A UNGA decision in 2021 set Bangladesh's graduation date at November 24, 2026. Thursday's decision extends the preparatory period for Bangladesh and Nepal by three more years.

The extension gives Bangladesh an opportunity to address gaps in its preparations and implement plans to meet the challenges that will follow graduation. During the preparatory period, some international support and trade benefits associated with the LDC status may continue under the applicable rules, but their nature and duration will vary across markets. The country should engage early with its major trading partners to clarify tariffs, rules of origin, and post-graduation market access arrangements. This is essential to remain competitive in the global market. Preferential access can help, but it cannot indefinitely offset high logistics costs, unreliable energy, slow customs procedures, low productivity, or limited product diversity. Bangladesh needs to improve port and transport efficiency, reduce production delays, strengthen labour and environmental standard compliance, and help firms shift towards higher-value product manufacturing. Exporters should also be provided with support to meet rules of origin and technical requirements at lower costs.

Trade agreements are one part of this adjustment. Bangladesh has signed a few trade agreements, among which the Economic Partnership Agreement with Japan and the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement with South Korea are positive steps. It should pursue more such agreements with key trading partners based on careful assessments of the markets, sectors and terms involved. Besides tariffs, these deals should also cover services, investment, customs, standards, rules of origin, digital trade, and technology cooperation. Of course, the success of these trade agreements will depend on the actual export growth, use of preferences, investment, technology transfer, and local firms' participation.

In this context, the need for diversifying exports beyond ready-made garment (RMG) products cannot be stressed enough. Bangladesh should expand production and exports of pharmaceuticals, leather goods, processed agricultural products, light engineering goods, and information technology services as well. This will require compliance with international standards, a skilled workforce, reliable energy, improved transport, and lower business costs. Access to finance and technology can help small and medium-sized enterprises enter new markets.

To this end, the commerce ministry should take the lead in formulating a national plan, in collaboration with the finance ministry, the National Board of Revenue (NRB), export agencies, businesses and workers, to address reciprocal tariffs and other trade barriers imposed by the trading partners. The plan should identify the products, firms and jobs most at risk and guide negotiations to secure predictable access to key markets. Before signing any trade agreement that includes tariff reductions, the government should assess its impact on local industries, employment, consumers and public revenue, and negotiate appropriate transition periods and/or safeguards. If energy, transport, ports, customs and finance are expensive, exporters cannot reduce costs on their own. The government should improve these services and give firms better access to finance, technical advice, worker training, and quality certification. With this support, businesses can upgrade machinery, adopt energy-efficient technology, reduce waste, improve productivity, and develop products for a wider range of markets.

Bangladesh also needs to reform import taxes. The government depends heavily on these taxes, but high duties and additional charges can raise the cost of raw materials and machinery for exporters, increasing production costs and making it harder to compete abroad. Tariffs should be rationalised gradually and predictably under a clear medium-term plan that removes unnecessary layers and aligns duties more closely with production and export competitiveness needs.



VISUAL: **SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR**

However, sudden cuts could create a revenue shortfall. The government must strengthen income tax and VAT collection, broaden the tax base, and improve tax administration to ensure that reduced reliance on trade taxes does not undermine essential public spending. It should also promptly refund import duties paid on materials used to produce exported goods and make bonded warehouse facilities easier for exporters to access, allowing them to import eligible inputs without paying duties upfront.

Bangladesh's financing landscape will change as the country graduates and becomes a developing country. Some LDC-specific funds and flexibilities will become less available. Financing terms are already tightening. Bangladesh will need to rely more on domestic revenue and efficient public investment. It should exercise caution with external borrowing. Commercial borrowing from global markets may be available to finance projects with clear economic returns. But this will require strong project appraisal, debt management and transparent disclosure.

The country also needs a dedicated climate finance strategy to secure concessional funding for adaptation, resilience, and loss and damage, while strengthening project preparation and meeting the funders' requirements. Linking climate plans, budgets, and investment priorities can direct resources to vulnerable communities and essential infrastructure.

Preparing for stricter intellectual property rules is also critical. As the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) flexibilities for LDCs are phased out, the pharmaceutical industry and other sectors may face new legal and compliance requirements. Bangladesh should strengthen IP administration, trade law expertise, and research and development. It should also promote innovation and technology transfer, protect public health, and ensure access to affordable medicines. A phased plan will be required to give firms and public institutions time to adapt.

The extension for Bangladesh's LDC graduation preparatory period comes at a time when the country is facing difficulties in several areas. Macroeconomic stability should be the top priority now. Controlling inflation, increasing revenue collection, managing external shocks, and improving banking sector governance are essential to improve investment and production. Overcoming these challenges requires deep reforms. The country should also implement its smooth transition strategy to sustain export competitiveness, employment and development as LDC-related support and flexibilities are gradually phased out.

Schools can help address our playground crisis



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RUHINA BINTA A GHANI

A recent report by *The Daily Star* on the disappearance of playgrounds and open spaces in Dhaka highlights a problem that is often treated as an urban planning issue. In reality, it is also a child health issue. According to Rajuk's Detailed Area Plan (DAP), at least 41 of Dhaka's 129 wards have no playgrounds or parks. The shortage is particularly alarming given that the city has only about 0.6 square metres of public open space per person, against the World Health Organization's recommended nine square metres. For children growing up in such an environment, opportunities for outdoor play are becoming increasingly scarce.

When children lose opportunities to play, the consequences extend far beyond recreation. Play is one of the primary ways children move, socialise, develop movement skills, and build emotional resilience. Yet for many children in Dhaka, particularly in densely populated neighbourhoods, opportunities for outdoor play are steadily shrinking.

My recent research involving primary school children in Dhaka found that many face significant barriers to active play, including safety concerns, limited access to suitable play spaces, academic pressures, and after-school tuition commitments. These concerns are understandable. In many parts of the city, children have few options beyond rooftops, parking areas, narrow lanes, or indoor environments.

The result is a generation spending more time sitting and less time moving.

This is particularly concerning because active play is not simply a source of exercise. Children who engaged in more active play in our study tended to demonstrate better movement competence and more favourable mental health outcomes. Active play was also associated with higher levels of physical activity and lower recreational screen use. In other words, play appears to support not only physical health but also social and emotional development.

When discussing solutions, the instinct is often to call for more parks and playgrounds. These investments are important and necessary. However, creating new recreational infrastructure requires time, land, and substantial resources. Dhaka's children need solutions now.

One practical solution may already exist within our communities: schools.

Bangladesh has achieved remarkable progress in school enrolment. Schools are among the few places that children access regularly and safely. Yet discussions about children's physical activity often assume that schools can contribute only if they have large playgrounds or sports fields.

Our pilot study suggests otherwise.

The intervention was delivered in a school that did not have a dedicated playground. Activities were organised using available school spaces, and children participated enthusiastically throughout the programme. Attendance remained high, enjoyment levels were consistently positive, and we observed encouraging changes in physical activity, active play participation, and movement skills.

These findings have important implications. Schools do not necessarily need large fields to promote active play. What they need is commitment, planning, and a willingness to view movement as part of children's development rather than as a distraction from education.

That does not mean academic concerns should be ignored. Many parents in our study worried about homework, tuition schedules, and examination preparation. Such concerns reflect the reality of family life in Bangladesh. But active play and academic achievement should not be seen as competing priorities. Children learn, socialise, and develop through movement. A childhood dominated entirely by classrooms, tutoring, and screens is unlikely to support healthy development.

The evidence suggests that school-based active play programmes can provide structured opportunities for movement while remaining compatible with educational goals. Importantly, children often continued playing the games introduced during organised sessions outside formal programme hours. This suggests that relatively simple interventions can have effects beyond the school day.

Parents must also be part of the solution. Reducing excessive screen use, encouraging outdoor play where possible, and recognising the developmental value of active play are all important. However, expecting families to solve the problem alone is unrealistic when many neighbourhoods lack safe and accessible spaces for children.

This is why city planners, education authorities, and local governments must work together. Investment in parks and playgrounds remains essential, particularly in rapidly urbanising areas. At the same time, schools should be recognised as valuable community assets that can help compensate for the shortage of recreational space.

A city where children have nowhere to play is a city that is limiting their opportunities to move, explore, socialise, and grow. Creating new play spaces may take years. Making better use of the spaces we already have can start today.

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WORLD CITIES DAY

We need to de-plot our urban imagination

THE GRUDGING URBANIST



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ADNAN ZILLUR MORSHED

Early this year, I visited the Barbican Estate, a sprawling mixed-use housing complex in London's historic financial district. Developed on a site in Cripplegate devastated by German bombing during World War II, the Barbican emerged from a fundamental question facing the City of London Corporation as it contemplated rebuilding: What should be the basic unit of a city—buildings or people? More specifically, should the site be redeveloped for offices, or should it become a place where people could live as a community, with shared civic facilities and easy access to workplaces and public transportation?

The Barbican Estate became a landmark of post-war residential architecture in Britain, representing a modernist experiment in high-density community living. Rather than a collection of individual houses, it comprises approximately 2,000 residential units arranged in interconnected blocks, supported by an array of cultural, educational, religious, recreational and commercial facilities. Its crown jewel is a network of public spaces anchored by an urban lake, a cascading waterfall, and aquatic vegetation. Residents and visitors alike enjoy its tranquil beauty. The Barbican's vision is unmistakable: to create a thriving, compact, and relatively self-sufficient "city within a city" that remains integrated with the larger urban fabric.

As I strolled around the Barbican, I thought about Dhaka and other cities in Bangladesh. Why, in our small country of more than 18 crore people—with Greater Dhaka alone accommodating nearly four crore—don't we explore a similar model of urban development? Why don't we embrace large-scale, mixed-use, community-oriented housing estates as the basic units of residential development instead of clinging to the individualistic notion of the "plot"? The point, of course, is not to copy the Barbican but to adapt its underlying principles to our local sociocultural and economic context.

In our urban imagination, we suffer from a national obsession with the plot. We have calcified it into an icon of middle-class aspiration, an oasis in our dreamscape. We habitually plot the city with plots. We are an unapologetic plot nation. Our cities are a social cartography of plots. In the Dhaka region, Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) develops townships and allocates plots, while private developers market plots as prized assets. Three-katha, five-katha, seven-katha and ten-katha plots are embedded in our urban DNA as milestones of social mobility. Newspaper advertisements relentlessly manufacture the mythology that owning a plot—on which one's private Taj Mahal will rise—is the epitome of wealth creation.

It is time to reimagine our urban practices by moving away from plot-based housing, a model that is impractical, even disastrous, for a land-scarce country, fundamentally incompatible with its staggering population-to-land ratio. If we are to house a large urban population on limited land, we must question the assumption that the individual plot should remain the basic unit of urban development.

The theme of this year's World Cities Day, "Regenerating the City: Adequate Housing for All", should prompt us to reconsider our approach. Housing insecurity is closely connected to economic precarity, social inequality, generational tensions, and the growing perception that urban resources and opportunities are rigged in favour of the wealthy and powerful. Unless we learn quickly how to accommodate large numbers of people on limited land, we risk perpetuating social discontent.

Consider Dhaka. According to the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA), the capital needs approximately 120,000 new housing units annually to accommodate its growing population. Yet the formal housing sector falls far short of this demand. A 2017 study by the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development estimated that the private sector supplied approximately 25,000 units annually, while the public sector's contribution was minimal. The resulting shortfall forces many residents, particularly low- and middle-income households, to rely on informal settlements, shared accommodation, and other arrangements that often lack adequate services and secure tenure.



A view of Old Dhaka from Nagar Bhaban on July 16, 2026. FILE PHOTO: STAR

That low-density, plot-based urbanisation is a misguided response is perhaps best illustrated by Purbachal, the so-called East Dhaka. This 6,200-acre township was laid out across extensive agricultural lands and ecologically sensitive floodplains, yielding approximately 26,000 residential plots of various sizes. About three decades ago, Rajuk planned this satellite township, and around 2008, it began selling plots through a lottery to people from various professions. The expectation was that houses would spring up quickly, easing Dhaka's population pressure—a planned city to the east. But that never happened.

That low-density, plot-based urbanisation is a misguided response is perhaps best illustrated by Purbachal, the so-called East Dhaka. This 6,200-acre township was laid out across extensive agricultural lands and ecologically sensitive floodplains, yielding approximately 26,000 residential plots of various sizes. About three decades ago, Rajuk planned this satellite township, and around 2008, it began selling plots through a lottery to people from various professions. The expectation was that houses would spring up quickly, easing Dhaka's population pressure—a planned city to the east.

But that never happened. Most buyers treated their plots as investment properties rather than places to live. They kept their primary residences in Dhaka proper, while their Purbachal plots served as financial assets. Consequently, they had little incentive to build. Leaving the land vacant posed no problem; its value would keep rising.

Today, Purbachal remains largely barren. Beyond its predatory land acquisition practices and staggering ecological insensitivity, the project suffered from two fundamental planning failures. First, access to plot ownership—although I question plot-based planning itself—should have been restricted to first-time homebuilders committed to constructing their homes promptly to meet an immediate housing need. Second, rather than subdividing land into individual plots, the government should have pursued large-scale, community-based and cooperative housing through public-private partnerships.

Under such a model, the public sector would provide utilities and urban services and select private-sector partners to develop housing estates offering a range of options, from affordable to luxury. Financing and profits would be shared through a carefully designed arrangement. An effective public oversight regime would ensure that the project did more than maximise private returns: it would become a community-oriented venture that benefited all stakeholders. This is one approach through which countries facing severe land constraints can address their housing challenges.

But Purbachal presents another, equally troubling problem. Imagine "East Dhaka" when fully developed: a forest of cubical buildings separated by mandatory setbacks, creating countless narrow, dark, poorly ventilated, and unusable spaces that compromise residents' privacy. Anyone who has lived in a Dhaka apartment building knows how unhygienic and dingy these spaces can become. Deprived of adequate sunlight and ventilation, they can become breeding grounds for disease and convenient dumping grounds for rubbish thrown from apartment windows above.

By consolidating, say, 200 five-katha plots, we could eliminate much of the redundant space between individual buildings while accommodating more apartments and providing residents with shared green spaces and community facilities. This would offer a healthier, more community-oriented approach to urban living—one increasingly embraced by cities around the world.

Instead of plot-centric housing initiatives, Bangladesh should look to alternatives such as Singapore's housing-estate model. In a country with limited land, Singapore has developed integrated residential environments capable of accommodating a large urban population. More than 80 percent of Singapore's resident population lives in flats built by the Housing and Development Board (HDB), which has developed an extensive network of housing estates since the 1960s. These estates function as integrated neighbourhoods, with schools, supermarkets, food courts, healthcare facilities, recreational amenities, and parks. Residents can walk to many everyday destinations rather than drive their children to school or travel long distances to access healthcare.

Bangladesh's experience over the past three decades, during which its urban population has grown dramatically, offers several lessons. Housing must be treated as a national system, informed by the country's daunting population-to-land ratio and fragile ecological conditions. Public-private partnerships can help foster a transparent, accountable framework for developing context-specific housing solutions. The government must ensure fairness in land acquisition and allocation, infrastructure provision, housing finance, and long-term management, while the public sector provides design excellence. Housing policy must not be reduced to the subdivision and sale of residential plots.

In The Right to the City (1968), French sociologist Henri Lefebvre wrote, "Housing does not necessarily become a public service. It surfaces into social consciousness as a right." If housing is an inalienable right, what kind of housing would be worthy of that right? The word "adequate" in this year's World Cities Day theme raises a broader question about what adequacy means. The plot as a unit of residential development is incompatible with the goal of adequate housing for all. We need to de-plot our imagination of future growth.

The secretariat relocation plan should open up Dhaka

BLOWIN' IN THE WIND



Dr Shamsad Mortuza is vice-chancellor at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB).

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

When we pass through Farmgate, one of the busiest junctions in Dhaka, the thought of farming rarely crosses our minds. As commuters, we think of schools, colleges, cinema halls, shopping hubs, buses or newspaper offices. The recent debate over Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University (SAU) has suddenly evoked memories of a vanished landscape that used to have agricultural facilities in its once urban fringe. In 1906, the British-Indian provincial government of Bengal established an agriculture department. Roughly 1,000 acres of farmland was allocated in what is now Manipuri Para. The entrance to the agricultural research laboratory—Khamarbari—established in 1909 was named Farmgate. The Bengal Agricultural Institute was established nearby in 1938, which was later christened as SAU in 2001. The farmland acquired new neighbours in the course of time as Dhaka, the living organism that grew out of the Buriganga River, extended its tentacles to hold onto as much as possible to support its burgeoning populace.

Dhaka kept on growing, repeatedly turning yesterday's outskirts into today's centre. The flood-prone wetlands in the east and the west caused Dhaka to claim the relatively higher land of the north. Today, agricultural land, administrative precincts, residential zones, and military installations share a metropolitan space, exceeding the purposes for which those estates were originally assembled.

When Dhaka became the second capital, the administrative complex was commissioned in 1959 to house the provincial assembly. Architect Muzharul Islam invited Louis I Kahn, his professor from Yale University, to design the newly commissioned administrative complex. The Ayub Khan government acquired land for Kahn's design in 1961. The first phase focused on the assembly hall, the adjacent plazas, an artificial lake, and the MP hostels. In 1963, the plan for the secretariat was proposed and later incorporated into the 1973 plan. The parliamentary complex was finished in 1982, but the secretariat remained incomplete.

Successive governments have talked about relocating the secretariat from its current location to the land adjacent to the parliamentary complex. The empty field, meanwhile, became popular for seasonal fairs. The installation of the convention hall transformed the area into a car park. On paper, this land belonged to the agricultural university. SAU requested the return of the land for research purposes after the trade fair ground was relocated to Purbachal. The field fields competing purposes into confrontation. Students protested the government's decision to consolidate its administrative units. Both groups are claiming to represent the public interest. Meanwhile, as citizens trying to cross the city, we have an interest that extends beyond either boundary.

Transplanting the administrative heart to the parliamentary zone can understandably cause panic because of the potential heavy inflow of traffic in an already congested locality. While the government and the SAU authorities battle over the land ownership, citizen concerns remain present. From an administrative perspective, ministries spread across different premises are currently facing coordination difficulties. Bringing offices together may improve working relationships, accommodation and access to shared facilities. Proximity to parliament will make sure that the policymakers and the bureaucratic enablers work in tandem.



Students of Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University (SAU), in protest of the government's plan to relocate the secretariat to the old trade fair ground in Dhaka's Sher-e-Bangla Nagar area, vandalised structures being built for two separate fairs, on October 28, 2026. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Conversely, SAU's objection merits attention. Agricultural education requires field study, and experiments may depend on soil conditions, irrigation, seasonal continuity and regular supervision. But the university must also be willing to ask whether agricultural education requires every activity to remain in central Dhaka. The answer can be found in the way the research components of Khamarbari were moved to Joydebpur (Gazipur) in 1966, leading to the birth of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI) in 1976. The broader agricultural estate associated with Farmgate and Sher-e-Bangla Nagar could be considered through the same functional approach. While land-intensive research, training and demonstration activities could move to suitable locations outside the congested core, agricultural policy and appropriate departmental headquarters could be brought together with the agriculture ministry within the proposed secretariat complex.

The current ownership dispute should not have placed the students in the spotlight. The university authorities must resolve the issue through published records and legal process. The raw sentiment of students deserves patient hearing. The government should provide a credible process before confrontation becomes the principal language of negotiation.

The scrutiny applied to the university location must extend to the nearby old airport in Tejgaon. The military repurposed the site after civilian airport operations relocated to Kurmitola. Questions already arise regarding the functions that necessitate this central location, the amount of land required, and the feasibility of accommodating civilian connectivity alongside them. The eastern and western corridors of the city are virtually disconnected. A new secretariat would make access to Sher-e-Bangla Nagar an even more consequential metropolitan question. The old airport can provide a major link.

The idea was explored by the Bangladesh Bridge Authority, who considered the construction of a tunnel beneath the old airport between the Jahangir Gate side and Rokeya Sarani at Agargaon. The report appeared less favourable because of financial assumptions and perceptions of tolls. But with the renewed interest in the administrative complex, the tunnel project could be revisited. The objective of the underpass, tunnel, overpass or improved perimeter should focus on people's commute. MRT access, feeder buses, staff transport and shaded, accessible walking routes must be integral to the plan. The proposed provision for 3,800 parked vehicles for the secretariat makes it particularly important to ask how employees and visitors who don't travel by private car will reach the complex.

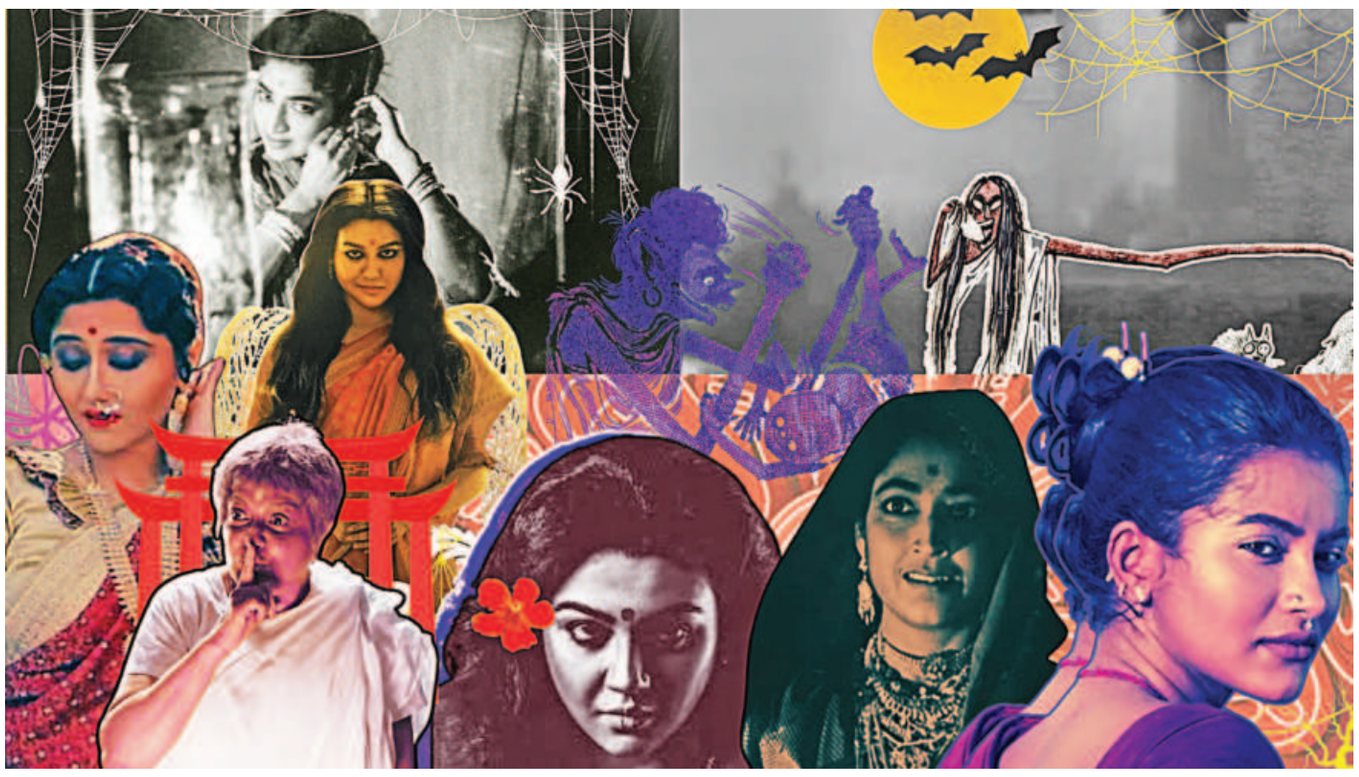
The university's relocation should add any released land to the nearby greenspace of Chandrima Udyan. Dhaka needs connected green space and safe pedestrian routes and places where people can gather. The newly planned ministry buildings should employ landscaped space to add to the much-needed greenery.

We should take advantage of the secretariat relocation proposal to intelligently reorganise this part of Dhaka. Planned growth can ensure that agriculture has the opportunity to expand beyond the congested core. It can allow administration to be streamlined and better coordinated. And the redesign of public space could allow citizens to gain greater connections and better access to it. Achieving that outcome requires each institution to accept change and the government to make its promises concrete before asking others to move.

Farmgate's name can preserve the memory of a farm even as agriculture finds a more expansive future elsewhere. The move will require a lot of spatial and conceptual adjustments. An institution must accommodate Dhaka, and Dhaka must accommodate its people.

The women who haunt BANGLA CINEMA

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE



VISUAL: ANIKA TAHSIN HAFSA

In Bangla folklore, a woman can die and still remain trapped in the expectations that governed her life. She returns with unfulfilled desires, unfinished domestic duties, the memory of a marriage or the grief of a life cut short.

She lurks beside ponds, wanders through bamboo groves, waits beneath trees and appears on deserted roads after dark. Her hair is often long, her feet may point the wrong way and her presence brings terror to anyone unfortunate enough to encounter her. For generations, these women have haunted Bangla ghost stories. On-screen, they have become more than figures of fear, carrying the weight of social expectations and lives that never quite belonged to them.

Among Bengal's best-known female spirits are the *petni* and the *shakchunni*. A *petni* is often associated with a woman who died unmarried or met an untimely death, with some regional beliefs linking her to pregnancy, childbirth or menstruation. Often imagined near ponds and trees, she remains a familiar figure in Bangla folk horror. The *shakchunni*, by contrast, is linked to marriage. Named after the conch-shell bangles worn by married Hindu Bengali women, she is often portrayed as a married woman who returns after death to reclaim the domestic life she lost, sometimes taking the place of a living wife.

The *daini*, or witch, is often imagined as an older woman whose independence, knowledge or behaviour makes her an object of suspicion. In Bangladeshi horror, *daini buri* evokes the frightening old woman of childhood tales, reflecting how age and appearance can turn a woman into a figure of fear. The *pishachini*, meanwhile, is generally portrayed as a dangerous female spirit or demon. Alongside the *daini*, she reflects cultural fears of women who challenge social expectations or are seen as threats to the established order.

Bangla cinema has explored these anxieties through women whose lives remain bound to marriage, wealth and domestic respectability even after death. Satyajit Ray's ***Monihara***, part of ***Teen Kanya***, centres on a woman whose attachment to jewellery shapes her haunting. The ornaments become remnants of an unfinished life, connecting the supernatural to the material expectations placed on women within marriage.

these women return to the places where their stories were misunderstood or silenced, reminding us that their haunting extends beyond the supernatural.

In ***Goynar Baksho***, a dead aunt and her treasured jewellery expose the precarious position of a widow within her family. Pishima's ghostly presence brings humour and bite to a social order that measures a woman's security through property and inheritance. Here, jewellery becomes more than a possession; it represents a woman's claim to identity and security within the family.

A contemporary variation appears in Soukarya Ghosal's ***Bhootpori***, where a dead widow befriends a young boy. Rather than presenting its ghost solely as a source of terror, the film brings widowhood and social exclusion into a supernatural narrative, giving its central figure warmth, humour and a history beyond fear.

In ***Bhooter Bhabishyat***, Kadalibala, the ghost of an actress, brings another dimension to the cinematic archive of female haunting. Her story draws attention to the precarious lives of women in entertainment, where reputation and public judgement can shape a woman's future. Through her, the haunting extends beyond marriage and domesticity to encompass work, fame and social standing.

Bangladeshi cinema offers its own variations. In ***Debi***, Anam Biswas's adaptation of Humayun Ahmed's novel, Ranu, played by Jaya Ahsan, experiences disturbing visions and appears to possess a supernatural sensitivity that the psychologist Misir Ali tries to understand. Though not a conventional ghost, she embodies the vulnerability of a woman whose experiences are interpreted, questioned and doubted by others. Her story connects the supernatural with trauma and memory, asking what happens when a woman's experiences fall outside the explanations available to those around her.

In ***Hawa***, Mejbaur Rahman Sumon places the mysterious Gulti in an isolated, male-dominated world at sea. Her presence unsettles the men aboard a fishing boat, while maritime folklore blurs the boundaries between the human and supernatural. Though she is neither a conventional *petni* nor a *shakchunni*, the men's reactions turn her presence into a source of fear and uncertainty.

Together, these films show how Bangla cinema draws on folklore to explore changing social fears. From the *petni* and *shakchunni* to the *daini* and ghostly widow, these figures carry the weight of expectations surrounding marriage, family and women's place in society.

Their power lies not only in their ability to frighten audiences, but also in the histories they preserve. Through cinema, these women return to the places where their stories were misunderstood or silenced, reminding us that their haunting extends beyond the supernatural.

TRENDY STREAMS

Netflix
The One About Matthew Perry



HBO Max
The Gilded Age



Hulu
The Drop: A Snowfall Saga



Prime Video
The Greatest



Apple TV+
Stick



OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA

'Non-duality'
October 30–November 10, 2026| 3:00–9:00 pm
Alliance Française de Dhaka, Dhanmondi



'Art Dhaka 2026'
November 6–10, 2026 | 9:00am- 12:00pm
Aloki, Dhaka



'Café de Volte'
November 20, 2026 | 6:00pm and 8:00pm
Jatra Biroti, Banani





TV TALKIES

'Carrie'

Carrie **is a supernatural horror series based on Stephen King's novel of the same name. The story follows Carrie White, a socially isolated teenager who struggles to fit in at her new school after spending years under the strict control of her deeply religious mother, Margaret. As Carrie faces relentless bullying from her classmates, she begins to discover her telekinetic powers, which allow her to move objects with her mind. As her powers grow, tensions rise and her life takes a terrifying turn.** ***Carrie*** **is now available to stream on Amazon Prime Video.**



WHAT'S PLAYING

'Thriller' by Michael Jackson

Michael Jackson's ***Thriller*** turns the atmosphere of a horror film into a dance-pop classic. Released in 1982 as the title track of his sixth studio album, the song follows a night filled with supernatural threats, fear and suspense. Written by Rod Temperton and produced by Quincy Jones, it blends a funky bassline, dramatic sound effects and Jackson's distinctive vocals to create an eerie yet danceable track.

The song's theatrical mood reaches its peak with a spoken-word passage by horror actor Vincent Price, whose chilling narration and sinister laugh remain among its most recognisable features. The accompanying 1983 music video, directed by John Landis, brought the song to life with elaborate make-up and its iconic zombie dance. Decades later, ***Thriller*** remains a defining moment in pop music.

STYLE STATEMENT

Tom Rhys Harries

Tom Rhys Harries has a way of making unconventional dressing look incredibly effortless. His personal style strikes a balance between relaxed masculinity and contemporary elegance, moving from sharply tailored suits to oversized silhouettes without losing its distinctive edge. His tousled hair and minimal accessories add to the appeal, giving his look a distinctly British, slightly rebellious character. It's this mix of individuality, understated confidence and sartorial experimentation that makes his style so compelling.



Dengue

FROM PAGE 12

Public health expert Mushtuq Hussain described the rising death toll as a failure of healthcare policy, calling for a shift from hospital-centred treatment to community-level interventions.

He stressed the need for early diagnosis, proper patient care and secondary-level observation, with tertiary hospitals and intensive care units (ICUs) serving as the final stage of treatment.

Mushtuq said low-income people often continue working despite having a fever due to financial pressures, delaying diagnosis until complications develop.

He called for a functional three-tier healthcare system and suggested piloting free dengue testing at existing primary healthcare facilities, with vulnerable patients referred to hospitals when necessary.

HM Nazmul Ahsan, associate professor at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital, said many dengue patients were arriving in critical condition.

"We are seeing a significant number of patients arriving in shock, with undetectable blood pressure and falling oxygen saturation," he said.

Ahsan said early treatment significantly improves recovery prospects for patients with dengue shock. Delays in transportation, emergency assessment and admission can cause irreversible organ damage and increase the risk of death.

Ahsan said he had observed severe complications, including liver, kidney, respiratory and heart failure, as well as myocarditis, or inflammation of the heart muscle, among dengue patients this year.

Such complications appear more common than in previous years, although further studies are needed to establish the reasons.

He said the circulation of dengue virus serotype 3 (DENV-3) could be a contributing factor, as variations within a serotype may affect disease severity.

Medicine specialist ABM Abdullah identified repeat infections and delays in diagnosis and treatment as major factors behind the rising death toll.

Many of those who died might have had dengue previously, making them more vulnerable to complications from subsequent infections, he said.

He urged people to seek medical advice and undergo testing if they develop fever and body aches rather than wait for their conditions to worsen.

Prof Kabirul Bashar of the Department of Zoology at Jahangirnagar University said dengue deaths might not rise at the pace seen in October but were likely to continue in November, with only a modest decline.

He stressed the need for intensified mosquito control, particularly indoors, where stagnant water provides breeding grounds.



Demonstrators march alongside a police officer, carrying a Godzilla effigy labelled "El Nino", during a rally in Jakarta, Indonesia, yesterday, to protest against ecological disasters and dirty energy policies. PHOTO: AFP

No reference to third country

FROM PAGE 1

He further said if any discussions involving other countries were necessary, representatives of those countries would have to be present at the table.

According to the joint statement, Bangladesh and Japan have agreed to upgrade the BIG-B initiative to "BIG-B for Shared Prosperity" to strengthen strategic cooperation between the two countries amid global changes, growing supply chain risks, rapid technological advances and increasing social challenges.

Tarique travelled to Japan on October 26 for a four-day official visit, during which he held bilateral talks with Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi. Subsequently, the two leaders issued a "Japan-Bangladesh Joint Statement".

Humaiun urged Jamaat-e-Islami to read the joint statement issued following the visit before claiming that Bangladesh had been "sold".

"I would first say, read the joint statement. Once you read it, you will understand that nothing of that sort happened...

"Jamaat-e-Islami is a major religious political party in Bangladesh. One expects responsible behaviour, responsible communication from them," he added.

The state minister was responding to a question about remarks made by Opposition Leader and Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman on Thursday, in which he raised concerns over the Matarbari deep-sea port and called on the government to safeguard Bangladesh's national interests, security and territorial sovereignty.

Responding to a question about interest rates on Japanese loans, he said Bangladesh would consider accepting investments that offer affordable interest rates, favourable terms and value for money.

Bangladesh had the flexibility to make that decision and would accept investments that align with its national interests, create employment opportunities and offer competitive terms, he added.

Humaiun said there was no scope for taking any action that went against the interests of the people and the country.

"The government will act with transparency and accountability. If any sensitive issues arise, they will be discussed in parliament. There was no scope for doing anything behind the scenes."

Japan respects this position of the Bangladesh government, and other countries would do the same. This is because a country that knows how to uphold its own dignity is respected by others, the state minister added.

Humaiun described the visit as highly productive, saying Japan had committed to continuing and expanding its development cooperation with Bangladesh, while the visit had also opened up opportunities for closer people-to-people ties.

Food preservation

FROM PAGE 12

Annual losses range from 20-25 percent for onions, 5-8 percent for potatoes, 8-9 percent for rice, 5-6 percent for pulses and 30-35 percent for mangoes.

Around four to five lakh tonnes of onions rot annually, causing losses of Tk 1,600-2,000 crore. BINA estimates that low-dose irradiation could reduce onion losses by 80-85 percent.

However, a top official of BINA told The Daily Star that the actual reduction in losses could only be determined through pilot operations and data collection.

He said a single centre would not be enough to address post-harvest losses nationwide. Further assessments would be needed to determine how many facilities should be established and where.

The Gazipur centre will accept all agricultural and food products, including those brought by small farmers. However, transportation costs could limit access for farmers and businesses far from Gazipur, he said.

The facility is expected to benefit traders, businesses handling large volumes of produce for cold storage and small entrepreneurs, particularly those near Gazipur.

Bhuiya said operational data, regional production volumes and the quantity of produce saved would help determine the need for additional centres. He also identified Belabo in Narsingdi as a target area under the project.

According to BINA, irradiation can extend the shelf life of onions from 30 days to four months, garlic from three months to 12 months, rice from 3-18 months to four years, papayas from 15 days to four months, strawberries from five days to three weeks, and mangoes and bananas from 10 days to three weeks.

Md Mahbubul Hassan Sohag, senior scientific officer and head of the electronics and health physics section at BINA, said gamma irradiation does not make food radioactive, as the radiation used lacks sufficient energy to induce radioactivity under the treatment conditions.

Instead, the process damages the biological cells of microorganisms, including bacteria and other pathogens, he said.

Sohag said the technology could also help Bangladeshi producers meet quarantine requirements for exporting high-value agricultural products to markets such as the United States and Europe.

According to BINA, food irradiation has been approved for 50 food items in more than 60 countries, with China and the United States being the largest users.

The technology is primarily used for vegetables, spices, meat, herbs and fresh fruits. Its use is also growing in Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Thailand and Vietnam.

Since 2007, India has used irradiation as a mandatory pest-control measure for mango exports to the US, while Australia uses it for summer fruits and vegetables exported to New Zealand.

Nearly four decades ago, two gamma irradiation plants were established at the Atomic Energy Research Establishment in Savar under the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission. They currently provide limited commercial services to producers and marketers of export-oriented pharmaceuticals and spices.



The radiation-based food preservation centre at the Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture (BINA) Regional Research Station in Gazipur. PHOTO: COLLECTED



Smoke rises as the Israeli military demolishes the homes of two Palestinian gunmen who killed two Israeli soldiers at a West Bank checkpoint the previous week, in the Israeli-occupied city of Hebron, yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Three more years to finish homework

FROM PAGE 1

conflicts and disruptions to international trade and energy supplies," plus jitters over migrant jobs, remittances and tourism.

Then came the line that summed up Dhaka's argument: "Meeting the graduation criteria does not eliminate structural weaknesses overnight."

Fair enough. Nobody sensible wants a country to graduate straight into a recession. The General Assembly's president, Khalilur Rahman, himself a Bangladeshi, framed the decision as a response to "the exceptional circumstances related to ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, disruptions to energy supplies and supply chains, global trade uncertainty and persistent structural vulnerabilities for both Bangladesh and Nepal."

He also said that recent political transitions in both countries had made things worse.

Now listen to the rest of the room. The European Union, which buys more Bangladeshi clothes than anyone, said it supported the extension. It then spent the rest of its speech explaining why nobody should get used to this. Such deferrals, the EU said, are "exceptional time-bound measures," not a departure from the established graduation criteria.

It warned that "a system in which countries remain in the category for prolonged periods, despite meeting the criteria, risks weakening the credibility of the framework." It reminded everyone that, under the UN's own rules, "domestic political transitions do not constitute grounds for extending preparatory periods," before conceding that Bangladesh's recent upheaval might merit some consideration. The EU also said the extra time must come with "concrete, measurable domestic actions, effective monitoring and continued engagement."

Canada, speaking also for Australia and New Zealand, was politer but no less clear: the extension "should serve as a catalyst for reform."

France skipped the diplomatic padding: "It is critical that these responsibilities be fulfilled by Bangladesh."

The message, in plain English: you may have your three years, but we will be checking your homework.

Bangladesh is not a hard-luck case. Past deferrals went to places like Samoa and the Maldives after tsunamis flattened coastlines. Bangladesh, by contrast, passes all three of the UN's graduation tests, on income, health and education, and economic vulnerability, by a comfortable margin. The UN's Committee for Development Policy said as much, and backed the delay only if Bangladesh makes "significant progress" on reform. The country did not ask for more time because it failed the exam. It asked because it was nervous about life after passing.

That nervousness is understandable, and also revealing, because much of what makes Bangladesh vulnerable is homegrown. Its tax take is among the lowest in the world for a country of its size and income. Its banks are clogged with bad loans, many handed out to the politically well-connected and never repaid.

Its exports lean on a single crutch: ready-made garments make up roughly 85 percent of the total, leaving the economy exposed to every change in Western fashion, tariffs or buyer sentiment. Investors complain about red tape, slow customs and unpredictable rules. The pandemic did not cause any of this. Neither did the Middle East. Those shocks simply hurt more because the foundations were shaky.

At the UN in July, Bangladesh promised to use any extension to shore up economic stability, raise domestic revenue, fix the financial sector, build productive capacity and diversify exports. All correct. Bangladesh has written a smooth transition strategy, and it reads beautifully. Let's accept that time by itself will not improve our readiness.

Graduation means giving up WTO-sanctioned export subsidies and, gradually, cheap concessional loans. A state that collects so little tax will struggle to support industry in other ways or to pay the higher cost of borrowing. The government should now publish a credible, year-by-year plan to lift the tax take, starting with the exemptions and special treatments that mostly benefit the rich.

Trade is where graduation bites hardest. When LDC preferences fade, Bangladesh will need the EU's GSP+ scheme, which comes with core conditions on labour rights, human rights, the environment and governance.

Bangladesh must now show progress on these reforms and report it to the UN every year. What's more, Bangladesh must get serious about signing trade deals with other big markets.

And Brussels monitors compliance.

Bangladesh must now show progress on these reforms and report it to the UN every year. What's more, Bangladesh must get serious about signing trade deals with other big markets. Rivals such as Vietnam already have them, while Bangladesh is still largely at the negotiating stage.

Nepal's homework looks different, though the subject is the same. Battered by floods in late August and heavily dependent on remittances and tourism, it was asked for "a clear time-bound plan to adjust and reprioritise its smooth transition strategy."

Bangladesh's task is to broaden its existing export base. Nepal's is closer to building one from scratch. Both face the same temptation: to treat a postponed deadline as a problem solved.

To his credit, Khalilur Rahman seemed alert to that risk. "Three additional years is not a retreat from graduation, but an investment in making it succeed," he said.

"This extended time is not time to stand still. It is time to act decisively."

Bangladesh's first checkpoint comes sooner than 2029. Next year the UN will hold a mid-term review of the Doha Programme of Action, its ten-year plan for the world's poorest countries.

Rahman has asked the UN to come to that meeting with a map of how graduating countries are faring on wider development goals, not just whether they clear the statistical bar, and has suggested the findings inform a rethink of the rules for leaving the group. That puts Bangladesh under the spotlight barely a year into its extension. Dhaka would do well to arrive with progress to show, not just reasons for more patience.

One more point for the government's diary. The goodwill that delivered a consensus this week is not a renewable resource.

Bangladesh has spent the past five decades confounding pessimists. It turned a country once written off as a "basket case" into one of Asia's steadiest growth stories. It has every chance of graduating with flying colours. But the extra three years are borrowed time, and borrowed time, like borrowed money, has to be repaid.

Jamaat eyes advisory council beyond party ranks

FROM PAGE 12

Ahsanul Mahboob Zubair, assistant secretary general of Jamaat and chief of its central publicity department, said the proposed council would provide expert advice to party leaders, including Ameer Shafiqur Rahman.

"Different individuals already advise the party on various matters. Having a formal platform would give those contributions institutional recognition. It would also make the individuals feel valued," he said.

Under Jamaat's constitution, individuals must become Rukon, or oath-bound members, to formally join its organisational structure. This limits opportunities for the party to formally engage people who support its political positions but remain outside the organisation.

Party leaders said the council would allow experienced professionals to advise on policy and other important matters without assuming organisational responsibilities.

Asked about the initiative, Abdul Halim said, "If someone can offer guidance that benefits the country, it will be a gain for us, for the party and for the country as well."

Party leaders said the proposal was part of broader constitutional reforms following the July uprising.

According to party sources, discussions have also covered greater transparency and accountability in financial management and revisions to organisational provisions.

The proposed amendments are being reviewed by the amendment committee, executive council and Majlish-e-Shura.

Stage set for tough coalition dialogue

FROM PAGE 12

camp spent Thursday amplifying unproven allegations that Arab-Israeli groups received foreign funding to influence the vote, accusations rejected by both Arab-majority lists and Qatar.

Israel's Shin Bet domestic security service said it was investigating suspected irregularities, but stressed the probe was not intended to "cast aspersions or place blame on an entire sector that went out to vote in a democratic and lawful manner".

The electoral commission also sought to calm tensions, with its acting director general Dean Livne saying any suggestion of widespread issues was "entirely groundless".

The controversy centred on allegations that Raam received money from Qatar, the energy-rich Gulf powerbroker that has channels to Hamas, to finance vote-buying operations.

"The Raamgate scandal is a political earthquake. Israel's elections have been stolen!" Netanyahu's Likud party said on Thursday.

Houthi drone downed in Makkah region

FROM PAGE 12

sparked a fire in the tanker's engine room that temporarily disabled the vessel, the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) said yesterday.

The crew were safe, there was no environmental impact and the fire had been extinguished, UKMTO said in an advisory note, adding that the vessel was continuing to its next port of call.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards said two oil tankers had been halted after encountering unspecified "incidents" while attempting to transit what Tehran considers an unauthorised route in the Strait of Hormuz.

Falling veggie prices bring relief to buyers

FROM PAGE 3

He said he had bought beans from the same market for Tk 120 per kg last week but paid Tk 80 yesterday. He also bought radish, eggplant, okra, and taro for Tk 40-60 per kg.

"Even last month, all vegetables except papaya and bottle gourd were priced above Tk 100 per kg. I had to buy smaller quantities then. I found today's prices reasonable," he said.

Meanwhile, Shafiqul Islam, a grocery shop owner at Mirpur-1 kitchen market, said despite the drop in prices for many early winter vegetables, tomatoes and new potatoes were still selling for more than Tk 150 per kg.

Sohag Mia, a wholesale trader at Karwan Bazar, said supply currently exceeded demand and it was difficult to make a profit.

ESSAY

The hungry women

RANIA FATEMA TUI



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

The power would go out around nine, as it did on most evenings of our childhoods, and the whole household would drift onto the veranda or rooftop with a hand fan and a plate of cut fruit. Somewhere between the first mosquito coil and the second round of tea, a grandmother would lower her voice. Do not whistle after dark, she would say. Do not answer if someone calls your name from the tamarind tree. And if a voice asks, through its nose, for a little fish, do not look back.

Nobody asked why the voice wanted fish. We were too busy being frightened.

It is a question worth asking now. The women who haunt Bengali folklore—the daini, the petni, the churel, the rakkhoshi and the shakchunni—are usually filled with horror, a shelf of things that go bump in the delta at night. But their stories read side by side, and a different pattern surfaces. These women are frightening not simply because they are monsters, but because their stories circle around hunger, deprivation and the threat of a woman who wants more than she is permitted to have.

Think about who ate last in the kind of household these stories grew up in. In some Bengali households, the choicest fish and meat went to guests and male family members, while women ate later or made do with less. Widows in some communities also faced restrictions on their diets, sometimes giving up fish and meat altogether. These practices varied across time, region and household, but they reveal how appetite could become a matter of social discipline.

Folklore has always been good at making the invisible visible. Sometimes, it gives deprivation a face, a voice and a pair of backwards feet.

If this tradition has a spine, it is the daini.

The daini is the woman blamed for what the community cannot explain. A child falls ill, a cow stops giving milk, a family's luck turns, and suspicion settles on someone already living at the margins. In some tellings, she is old, widowed or isolated, a woman without the protection that comes with belonging to a household.

Her supposed power is frightening, but so is the ease with which it can be assigned to her. Calling someone a witch transforms uncertainty into accusation. The community gets a culprit, and misfortune acquires a face.

The daini is imagined as powerful enough to harm an entire household, yet vulnerable enough to be cast out by it. Her story asks who gets blamed when things go wrong, and why a socially isolated woman can become a more convenient explanation than circumstances themselves. Sometimes, the monster is not the person who threatens the community, but the person the community has decided it can afford to threaten.

The petni, by contrast, arrives with a request.

In many Bengali tellings, she is the nasal-voiced ghost who trails a night traveller and begs for fish. The details vary, but the request is ordinary. Why fish? Why not revenge, gold, or a human life? The ghost wants something that might have appeared on a dinner plate.

In some Bengali households, widows have historically faced restrictions on what they could eat, including fish and meat. The petni's appetite does not establish a direct connection to these practices, but it makes an evocative comparison possible. What if the ghost's hunger reminds us of a woman whose ordinary pleasures were restricted while she was alive?

She asks for so little that her desire seems almost innocent. Yet she must approach the living as something uncanny to express it. Her hunger survives the body that might have been disciplined into going without. Perhaps the most unsettling thing about the petni is not that she wants fish, but that even after death, she is still asking.

The churel is more disturbing because her body becomes the site of the horror.

In many tellings, she is a woman who dies during pregnancy or childbirth, her feet turned backwards so that her tracks deceive anyone attempting to follow her. Other versions give her different histories, but the childbirth narrative carries a particular unease. What happens when a woman dies in the very process through which her family and community expect life to continue?

In Bengali fairy tales, including stories associated with Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumder's *Thakurmar Jhuli* (1907), rakkhoshis threaten the security of the household through disguise, deception and appetite. In familiar versions, a monstrous woman assumes a trusted appearance, drawing close to the people she threatens. The danger lies partly in discovering that someone who seems to belong inside the home may actually be its predator.

Her backwards feet make the familiar body unfamiliar. They turn following into a trap, unsettling the ordinary relationship between movement and direction. Read alongside the story of maternal death, this inversion suggests a world turned wrong: the woman expected to give life instead loses hers, and her return becomes something to fear.

In some tellings, the churel is also sexually dangerous and capable of harming men. Her transformation from vulnerable woman to threatening ghost gives her a power she may never have possessed in life, only for that power to become another reason to fear her. The story cannot undo her death, but it can imagine her returning with the ability to frighten those who remain.

Then there is the rakkhoshi, who gets to do what the others cannot: eat openly.

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The rakkhoshi does not ask for a meal; she threatens to consume others. She turns the household's ordinary arrangements upside down. The woman expected to nourish and protect becomes the one who devours.

This is an excerpt. Read the full essay on *The Daily Star* and Star Books and Literature websites.

Rania Fatema Tui *is a writer and master of making simple tasks complicated. Powered by iced coffee and last-minute panic, she spends 10% of her time typing, 90% staring at a blank screen, and re-reading texts five times before sending.*

FICTION

Nazma's uncertain journey

KAMRUL AHSAN



ILLUSTRATION: MAHMUDA EMDAD

After her second marriage fell apart, Nazma married off her 15-year-old son to her brother's 14-year-old daughter. She wanted to drive the emptiness out of the house by bringing in a new person and to bind her son to the home. Seven years ago, five years after her first husband had gone off with another woman, Nazma had married a second time. Among the drivers she cooked rice for at the mess, there was a van-puller named Asgar who lived there. In the gaps between her cooking, she would now and then exchange a few words of joy and sorrow with Asgar. Asgar would tell her about the breakup with his wife, and Nazma would tell him about the pain of losing her husband. Little by little, the two grew close, and at some point, they decided to marry. But Naimul could not stand the sight of his stepfather. He cursed his mother with the foulest words whenever he felt like it and stayed out of the house as much as he could. While still very young, the boy had fallen into bad company and drugs. Asgar, for his part, couldn't tolerate Naimul either. Caught in this snake-and-mongoose hatred between her husband and her son, Nazma was at her wits' end. Again and again, she felt it would have been better if she had never married. But she couldn't make anyone understand how empty she felt inside her own chest.

Nazma had been married for the first time at a very young age. The son was born soon after the wedding, and though he shot up quickly, Nazma herself had not yet grown old. So, by the very nature of youth, she'd had no choice but to marry again. When Asgar went back to his first wife two years later, Nazma took some comfort in at least this: that now, perhaps, her son would come back home. But having tasted the fun of the outside world, the boy's heart no longer settled at home. Nazma had asked around and got him a job at a big grocery shop. But every few days she'd hear that the boy's mind wasn't on his work, that he slipped away whenever he got the chance. Left with no other way, Nazma married her son off.

In the midst of this running about, Nazma also kept trying with all her might to bring her second husband back home. Even after Asgar had gone to his first wife, on paper and in writing the two of them had not been separated. So hope hung on in Nazma's mind: perhaps, somehow, by clasping his hands and feet, Asgar could be brought back.

But once her brother's daughter came into the house as her daughter-in-law, a different problem arose. The daughter-in-law found out that her mother-in-law worked in other people's homes. She had known that her aunt, now her mother-in-law, worked as an aya in an office, and there had been a little respectability in that. Nazma did do that job, but after evening she also cooked at a Madam's house, and this wounded the daughter-in-law's pride. She kept a sullen face all day and put her hand to no household work. This made no difference to Nazma. She did the work herself and fed her son and his wife. As long as her son stayed at home, her heart was full. But this arrangement didn't last either. Over a small quarrel, the daughter-in-law went off to her father's house. As a result, the son began making more and more trips between Dhaka and Brahmanbaria. Even after pleading with her brother, Nazma could not bring her brother's daughter back to her own home. Instead, her brother got the son into his grip and put him to work at a wholesale warehouse in Brahmanbaria.

Meanwhile, a child was born to her son. To see her grandchild's face, Nazma too had to rush between Dhaka and Brahmanbaria two or four times a month. Between her job and cooking at Madam's house, she could hardly manage. Friday was her only day off. Boarding the Brahmanbaria train on Thursday night, she had to reach her brother's house in the last hours of the night. This meant seeing the dark faces of her brother, her brother's wife, her son and her son's wife. But the sight of her grandchild's smiling face soothed Nazma's heart.

In the midst of this running about, Nazma also kept trying with all her might to bring her second husband back home. Even after Asgar had gone to his first wife, on paper and in writing the two of them had not been separated. So hope hung on in Nazma's mind: perhaps, somehow, by clasping his hands and feet, Asgar could be brought back.

But where would she find Asgar? If she called his mobile a hundred times, Asgar would graciously pick up once or twice. The moment he answered, he would pour out abuse, whatever came to his mouth: "You wh*re, why do you keep ringing my phone? Didn't I tell you I won't live with you anymore? Still, you keep tormenting me, why! Call me again, b*tch, and I'll give you a proper thrashing."

Asgar would cut the call. Still, Nazma kept calling, and calling. What else was there for her to do but call?

Translated from Bangla by Alamgir Mohammad. This is an excerpt. Read the full story on *The Daily Star* and Star Books and Literature websites.

Kamrul Ahsan *is active in every field of writing except poetry. Besides short stories, novels and essays, he writes television dramas and also translates.*

Alamgir Mohammad *teaches literature at the tertiary level. He has published 25 translation titles, including* Mrityukshuda *by Kazi Nazrul Islam and* New Normal and Other Poems *by Pias Majid,* The Portrait of an Adivasi Beloved *by Ehasan Mahmud and* Selected Letters *of Kazi Nazrul Islam.*

DHAKA SATURDAY OCTOBER 31, 2026, KARTIK 15, 1433 BS

SPORT



Bangladesh's Under-15 national football team finished as runners-up in the E-tier competition of the inaugural FIFA U-15 World Cup & Festival 2026 after suffering a 4-1 defeat to the Central African Republic in the final in Azerbaijan yesterday.

***Read full story on The Daily Star website*

Nayeem steps out of shadows

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Bangladesh off-spinner Nayeem Hasan had to wait patiently for his opportunity in the ongoing opening Test against West Indies. When it finally came, however, he made it count, taking four wickets on the third day in Mirpur yesterday to help the hosts secure a 27-run first-innings lead.

Picked as the third specialist spinner, Nayeem was sparingly used on Thursday as the visitors batted for 48 overs. Mehidy Hasan Miraz and Taijul Islam bowled 19 and 15 overs respectively, while Nayeem was introduced only in the 25th over and sent down three overs.

He had to wait another 21 overs the next day. Nayeem soon created two close chances, one of which went begging when Mominul Haque dropped West Indies captain Roston Chase at short leg.

The 26-year-old finally broke through in the last over before lunch, trapping Justin Greaves leg-before to end a 51-run sixth-wicket stand. He then claimed the final three wickets in quick succession as West Indies were bowled out for 245 after lunch.

It was a timely reminder of what Nayeem can offer despite often finding himself behind Miraz and Taijul -- and, before them, Shakib Al Hasan -- in Bangladesh's spin hierarchy.

His limited role was evident in the one-off Test against Afghanistan in Abu Dhabi earlier this month, when he returned to the starting line-up after a gap of nearly 16 months. Although Afghanistan batted for 89.1 and 142 overs, Nayeem bowled only 10 and 14 overs respectively, without taking a wicket. Miraz and Taijul, meanwhile, bowled 54 and 69 overs, sharing five wickets in the drawn match.

Speaking after the day's play yesterday, Nayeem credited captain Najmul Hossain Shanto's encouragement for helping him stay confident despite his restricted role. "He told me that even if I bowled poorly, I would continue bowling throughout the day," Nayeem said.

He also recalled Miraz's playful encouragement during the lunch break, when the senior all-rounder urged him to share the wickets.



"'You take two wickets and I'll take two ... we won't let Taijul bhai get any,' Miraz bhai was saying. Later, he said, 'You've already taken three wickets!'"

Nayeem's four-for also brought up his 50th Test wicket, making him the quickest Bangladeshi spinner to reach the milestone by balls bowled (2,856). He achieved the feat in his 16th Test, eight years after making an impressive debut with a five-wicket haul against West Indies in Chattogram.

Despite the milestone, Nayeem was quick to defend the captain's reliance on Miraz and Taijul, saying he understood that "the captain decides what he thinks is best for the team".

As for the time taken to reach 50 wickets, Nayeem said it was "not really in my hands". For a bowler so often left waiting, however, the performance offered a glimpse of his value when given a sustained opportunity.



Bangladesh batter Tawhid Hridoy goes for a big heave off the second delivery he faced on Day 3 of the first Test against West Indies at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. Hridoy paid the price, departing for a two-ball duck as the Tigers slumped to 79 for six, leading by just 106 runs, at the close of play.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Belief all that's left for Tigers

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Instead of stamping their authority on the game, Bangladesh's batters were left in despair at the end of Day 3 of the first Test against West Indies at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium yesterday.

The dark clouds over Mirpur, which interrupted play several times and contributed to a reduced number of overs on each of the three days, brought back memories of other matches in recent years when batting collapses repeatedly saw Bangladesh surrender control.

With the Tigers reeling at 79 for six, leading by just 106 runs, the inevitable question at the post-day press conference was what had been going through the batters' minds.

A perplexed Nayeem Hasan, asked to explain Tawhid Hridoy's shot selection, said: "Actually, I don't know what was going on in his mind. It's better if I don't talk about it. At that time I was getting ready, so didn't see what the dressing room reaction was."

After an abysmal dismissal in the first innings on Day 2, Hridoy once again appeared to lose sight of the situation. Having just arrived at the crease, he launched into a wild heave against Roston Chase, offering a simple catch to mid-on off just the second delivery he faced. The previous day, he had been bowled on the second delivery he faced trying to do the same.

Batting collapses have long been part of Bangladesh cricket across formats, but in Tests, the team often seems to bring them upon itself. The decision to prepare a spin-friendly pitch may have backfired this time, but it was difficult to escape the feeling that the batters were doing little to help themselves.

When Mominul Haque, who had suffered a blow to the head while fielding, did not come out to bat following Tanzid Tamim's dismissal, concerns grew over the possibility of Bangladesh needing a concussion substitute. With Mushfiqur Rahim's services unavailable, the team had also turned to Hridoy in a crucial batting position, only to see him throw his wicket away with a shot that was so inexplicable that it can't even be termed a brain fade.

Before that, Tanzid had fallen at gully after attempting to flick a Shamar Joseph delivery and closing the face of his bat too early. Shadman Islam, who had scored a century in the first innings and looked settled again in the second, left a gap between bat and pad, playing for the turn against Chase and being bowled. Skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto suffered a similar fate, missing Chase's straighter delivery after playing for the turn.

A perplexed Nayeem Hasan, asked to explain Tawhid Hridoy's shot selection, said: "Actually, I don't know what was going on in his mind. It's better if I don't talk about it. At that time I was getting ready, so didn't see what the dressing room reaction was."

Litton Das, meanwhile, fell prey to Jomel Warrican, who did what Bangladesh's spinners had struggled to do -- flight the ball and extract turn from just in front of the batter. Litton, who did not play for the turn, was trapped leg-before.

It was left to Jaker, who came in as Mominul's concussion substitute, and specialist spinner Nayeem to offer some resistance. Their 26-run stand was hard-earned and proved valuable in the context of the match, taking Bangladesh's lead beyond 100.

Asked whether the poor shot selections stemmed from panic, Nayeem insisted there had been no such feeling in the dressing room.

"Everyone had belief that someone would carry the innings. Litton bhai had done it before, so there was that belief," he said.

But that belief has taken another hit. Litton is already back in the pavilion, while Jaker, who is playing his first Test in more than a year, was not even earmarked for the playing XI at the start of the match.

Bangladesh's batting plans now look increasingly convoluted, leaving the remaining batters and the spin attack with a monumental task if the Tigers are to keep their hopes of remaining in contention for the World Test Championship final alive.

"Believe that me and Jaker bhai can make our innings longer," Nayeem said in his parting assessment.

For now, belief and a miracle are all the Tigers have left to hold on to.



15-minute hattrick, 15 more to go

Cristiano Ronaldo scored a 15-minute hattrick in Al Nassr's 5-3 Saudi Pro League win over Al Kholood on Friday, taking his career goal tally to 985. With the score tied at 2-2, Ronaldo struck in the 66th, 72nd and 81st minutes to seal the victory, leaving himself just 15 goals short of the unprecedented 1,000-goal milestone. At this rate, it appears to be a matter of when, rather than if, the five-time Ballon d'Or winner reaches the landmark. This was Ronaldo's seventh hattrick for Al Nassr since joining the club in 2023, and his staggering 67th career hattrick for club and country (44 for Real Madrid, 10 for Portugal, three for Manchester United and three for Juventus), putting him five clear of second-placed Lionel Messi in this category.

PHOTO: X

Irfana breaks 12-year-old record

SPORTS REPORTER

Irfana Khatun stole the spotlight on the third day of the Max Group 35th National Swimming, Diving and Water Polo Championship at Syed Nazrul Islam Swimming Complex in Dhaka yesterday, breaking a 12-year-old record in the women's 50m breaststroke.

The Bangladesh Army swimmer clocked 34.57 seconds to better the previous mark of 34.85, set by SA Games double gold-medallist Mahfuza Khatun Shila in 2012. The victory completed Irfana's sweep of all three women's breaststroke events, each with a record-breaking performance over the three days.

Her teammate Mukti Khatun took silver in 34.85 seconds, while Bangladesh Navy's Mukta Khatun finished third in 37.00.

Irfana also helped Bangladesh Navy's 4x200m freestyle relay team, alongside Mukti, Summa Khatun and Jui Akhter, set a new mark of 9:47.99, erasing the previous record of 9:50.01 set by the Navy team last year.

Bangladesh Navy maintained their lead in the medal table with 28 gold, 18 silver and 13 bronze medals. Bangladesh Army remained second with 12 gold, 18 silver and 22 bronze, while BKSP stood third with two silver and six bronze.





Crisis clash at the Bridge

STAR SPORTS DESK

Michael Carrick may have survived the sack this week, but his Manchester United side face another daunting test on Saturday when they travel to Stamford Bridge to take on an under-performing Chelsea in a crunch Premier League encounter.

Sitting just one point above the relegation zone amid their worst league start in 40 years, United are winless in eight matches in all competitions (D3 L5) since beating Sabah in the Champions League in September.

Carrick miraculously survived the sack following Sunday's 3-0 home humiliation to Bournemouth, but a defeat here could risk making him the third manager fired by powerbroker Jim Ratcliffe since 2024.

Behind the scenes, the camp is fractured: captain Bruno Fernandes was dropped last weekend for criticising tactics, while Lisandro Martinez was fined for blasting the club's transfer policy.

Despite sitting 11 places and six points ahead of United, morale under Xabi Alonso is similarly bleak in West London. Chelsea recently suffered consecutive defeats -- a shock 2-0 home loss to Tottenham, followed by a penalty-shootout EFL Cup fourth-round exit at Liverpool.

Scoring seven combined goals against Bournemouth and Everton post-international break proved a false dawn. Chelsea have slipped from the top four with a porous defence, conceding 15 Premier League goals (only Crystal Palace's 19 and Ipswich's 16 are worse) and averaging two goals shipped per home game.

With both managers desperate to avoid a third straight defeat across all competitions, history slightly favours the visitors. Chelsea have won just two of the last 17 Premier League meetings (D8 L7), though both of those victories -- 4-3 in 2023-24 and 1-0 in 2024-25 – came at Stamford Bridge.

WHAT TO WATCH

T SPORTS

Bangladesh vs West Indies
1st Test, Day 4
Live from 9:30 am

Pakistan ODI Tri-Series
Final
Pakistan vs Sri Lanka
Live from 5:00 pm

LaLiga
Real Betis vs Malaga
Live from 11:30 pm

Barcelona vs Deportivo
Live from 2:00 am (Sunday)

STAR SPORTS SELECT HD1

Premier League

Chelsea vs Man Utd
Live from 6:30 pm

Man City vs Brighton
Live from 9:00 pm

Tottenham vs Crystal Palace
Live from 11:30 pm

Aston Villa vs Fulham
Live from 2:00 am (Sunday)





Dengue toll hits 418, third-highest since 2000

HELEMUL ALAM

Three more dengue-related deaths were reported yesterday, bringing this year's death toll to 418, the third-highest annual toll since Bangladesh recorded its first outbreak in 2000.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), the highest number of dengue deaths was 1,705 in 2023, followed by 575 in 2024, 413 in 2025, 281 in 2022 and 179 in 2019.

Highest number of deaths was 1,705 in 2023, 575 in 2024, 413 in 2025, 281 in 2022 and 179 in 2019.



A recent death review of 119 dengue patients by the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research, led by its director Quazi Ahmed Zaki, found that more than one-third died within 24 hours of hospital admission.

The review identified dengue shock syndrome as the leading cause of death (62.5 percent), followed by expanded dengue syndrome (31.2 percent), dengue with bleeding (16.1 percent) and other causes (12.5 percent). Many patients also faced diagnostic delays of at least three days.

Zaki said hospital-based death review committees examine each case and submit their findings to the DGHS's Disease Control unit. The reviews assess causes of death, treatment quality, diagnostic delays, patients' conditions before admission and the use of contraindicated medicines to identify gaps in patient management.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1



Residents comfort each other amid the rubble of a house destroyed in an Israeli strike at the Bureij refugee camp in the Gaza Strip yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Food preservation tech to cut post-harvest losses

Tk 115cr irradiation centre in Gazipur launches today

SUKANTA HALDER

Farmers may soon be able to reduce post-harvest losses and extend the shelf life of agricultural produce through a radiation-based food preservation centre set up at the Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture (BINA) Regional Research Station in Gazipur.

25-30% of farm produce lost annually | Post-harvest losses cost Tk 20,000cr a year | Centre can process 85,000 tonnes annually

Agriculture Minister Mohammed Aminur Rashid is expected to inaugurate the Tk 115 crore gamma irradiation centre today.

Funded by the Program on Agricultural and Rural Transformation for Nutrition, Entrepreneurship and Resilience in Bangladesh, the facility was commissioned in September 2026.

BINA officials said the technology could extend the shelf life of agricultural produce by eliminating insects, parasites, pathogens and harmful microorganisms responsible for post-harvest damage.

According to a BINA document, the centre can process 8-10 tonnes of produce an hour and up to 85,000 tonnes annually, operating in three shifts a day.

Officials said 25-30 percent of the country's agricultural produce is lost after harvest every year, costing around Tk 20,000 crore.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 1

Jamaat eyes advisory council beyond party ranks

MAMUNUR RASHID

Jamaat-e-Islami is planning to form an advisory council comprising experts and intellectuals from outside the party to help shape its policies and decisions.

Party leaders have agreed in principle to the proposal, but the council's structure, size, membership criteria and responsibilities have yet to be finalised.

Abdul Halim, assistant secretary general of Jamaat, said the proposal would be placed before the party's next Majlish-e-Shura meeting after further review.

If approved, the party will amend its constitution to establish the council, which may include experts in economics, law, education, politics, religion and natural resources, as well as writers, academics and literary figures.

"The idea of forming an advisory council has received unanimous support. However, the practical and related aspects of the proposal are yet to be finalised. It will be placed before the next Majlish-e-Shura meeting again," Abdul Halim told The Daily Star.

He said the proposal was first raised at a Central Executive Council meeting on June 26. The party's annual Shura meeting may be held in late November or early December.

SEE PAGE 9 COL 6

Houthi drone downed in Makkah region

Says Saudi coalition; Iran-backed group denies claim

AGENCIES

- Houthi missiles fired towards Riyadh downed
- Tanker in Hormuz hit by boat-borne explosives
- Mediators return to Tehran to push for US-Iran deal

The Saudi-led coalition said yesterday it intercepted and destroyed a drone fired by Yemen's Houthis in the Makkah region, with the group later denying it targeted Islam's holiest city.

"A drone launched by the terrorist Houthi militia has been intercepted and destroyed in the Makkah region," coalition spokesman Turki al-Malki wrote in a post on X. Houthi military spokesman Yahya Saree called the Saudi statement "a massive and egregious fabrication".

Saudi Arabia has reported Houthi missiles fired in the regions of Makkah several times, with the group denying it fired towards the holy city.

On Thursday night, the coalition downed two ballistic missiles launched by the Iran-backed group towards Riyadh, soon after AFP correspondents heard explosions in the capital.

Meanwhile, a tanker in the Strait of Hormuz was hit by a small boat with two explosive devices attached to its hull, causing blasts that

SEE PAGE 9 COL 6

ISRAELI ELECTIONS

Stage set for tough coalition dialogue

Netanyahu's bloc wins 53 seats, opposition 48 and Arab parties 19

AFP, *Jerusalem*

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's camp finished ahead of the opposition but remained well short of a majority, final results from Israel's general election showed yesterday, setting the stage for tough coalition talks or potentially another vote.

Netanyahu's coalition of right-wing and far-right parties won 53 of the Knesset's 120 seats, with his Likud party remaining the largest faction with 27 seats. The opposition bloc, led by centrist Gadi Eisenkot, secured 48 seats.

The results from the Central Elections Committee also cemented the emergence as potential kingmakers of the Arab party groupings Raam and the Joint List, with the two winning a combined 19 seats.

The fragmented outcome sets the stage for difficult negotiations to form a government that could last weeks, with no single bloc able to reach the 61-seat threshold needed and the prospect of another election remaining if talks fail.

The final tally came after Netanyahu's

SEE PAGE 9 COL 6



A man carrying a child browses makeshift fruit stalls set up between railway tracks in the capital's Khilkhet area yesterday. Vendors briefly clear the tracks as trains approach and return moments later to resume business -- a practice that endangers public safety and train operations. PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

IN BRIEF

Measles toll rises to 1,251 as 2 more die

UNB, *Dhaka*

Two patients died with measles-like symptoms in 24 hours, till 8:00am yesterday, bringing the country's combined tally of confirmed and suspected measles-related deaths to 1,251 this year.

The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) has classified all latest fatalities as suspected measles deaths.

With these, the total number of suspected measles deaths has reached 1,146 while confirmed deaths from measles remain at 105.

A total of 1,316 new suspected measles cases were reported during the 24-hour period, bringing the cumulative number of suspected cases nationwide to 227,673.

Meanwhile, 75 new confirmed measles cases were recorded, bringing the total number of laboratory-confirmed infections to 23,770.

6 killed, 2 hurt in lightning strike in Pabna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Pabna*

At least six people were killed and two others critically injured in a lightning strike at Sonapatil Beel in Malonchi union of Pabna Sadar upazila yesterday evening.

The victims were fishing in the beel when lightning struck, killing six on the spot and critically injuring two others, according to police and locals.

Identities of all the victims could not be confirmed immediately.

Officer-in-Charge of Pabna Sadar Police Station Tarikul Islam confirmed the incident, saying police had visited the spot.

The victims were residents of wards 2 and 6 of Malonchi union, he said.

Three of the bodies have been handed over to their families, the OC added.

WR
WEEKEND READ
DHAKA SATURDAY OCTOBER 31, 2026, KARTIK 15, 1433 BS
The Daily Star



For families living in the Bhabadah region, waterlogging has been a part of life for decades. Many have lost the comfort and security of their homes, while some have moved away permanently.

Will Bhabadah ever be free of waterlogging?

Despite decades of drainage projects and hundreds of crores spent, residents continue to lose their homes, farmland and livelihoods to persistent waterlogging

DIPANKAR ROY, *Khulna*

The water in Kapalia Beel, in Jashore's Manirampur upazila, rarely falls below waist level, even in the dry season. During the monsoon, it rises further, spilling onto roads and into homes, submerging courtyards and living rooms. At times, villagers have no choice but to abandon their homes and take shelter on roads.

For families living around the beel, in the Bhabadah region, waterlogging has been a part of life for decades. Many have lost the comfort and security of their homes, while some have moved away permanently.

The situation is much the same across Bhabadah, where prolonged waterlogging has devastated farmland, disrupted education and deprived thousands of families of their livelihoods since the installation of the 21-vent Bhabadah sluice gate.

The region covers parts of Abhaynagar, Manirampur and Keshabpur upazilas in Jashore, and Dumuria and Phultala upazilas in Khulna. It has at least 52 beels connected to rivers, including the Mukteshwari, Teka, Hari, Shree, Upper Bhadra and Buribhadra. Years of siltation have reduced the rivers' capacity and obstructed drainage, leaving vast areas inundated for months.

In Kalishakul village, less than 500 metres from the sluice gate, farmland has remained underwater through successive crop seasons. More than 250 families have been unable to cultivate their land, pushing them into years of hardship.

Pradip Mondal, a resident, said water from 27 nearby beels was supposed to drain through the sluice gate. Yet rainwater more than three feet deep had remained on his land for over five months, preventing him from growing Aman paddy last year.

> **I could not cultivate Aman paddy for 12-13 years due to waterlogging. If the water level falls enough, I manage to cultivate Boro paddy in some years. For past three years, even that opportunity did not come.**
> **Pradip Mondal**, a local

Hoping to recover some of his losses during the Boro season, he rented three kathas of land near Kapalia Beel to prepare paddy seedbeds. He planned to transplant the seedlings to his own land once the water receded. But it never did.

"I could not cultivate Aman paddy for 12-13 years due to waterlogging. If the water level falls enough, I manage to cultivate Boro paddy in some years. For past three years, even that opportunity did not come," Mondal said.

Unable to grow either crop, he has turned to fishing to make ends meet.

"If I cannot grow crop on my land for years after years, how am I going to feed my family and come out of poverty?" he asked.

Like Mondal, many families that once depended on their harvests now survive on fishing and whatever other work they can find.

The crisis extends across Kulutia and Haridas Kati unions in Manirampur, Payra union in Abhaynagar, and adjoining areas.

Its effects are not confined to agriculture. More than 200 educational institutions in the region remain submerged for around three months a year, sometimes longer, disrupting lessons and making it difficult for children to attend school.

> **The challenge, however, is not simply choosing between excavation and Tidal River Management. Bhabadah needs a coordinated approach based on hydrological research, reliable data on river levels and sediment accumulation, and a thorough understanding of how water moves across the basin.**

Ranjita Bairagi, from Hatgachha village in Manirampur, brought her son Chinmoy, an eighth-grader, to Hatgachha Secondary School, where classrooms were submerged. There were no benches for students, while tin-roofed rooms offered little comfort for lessons.

"Have you ever seen a school like this anywhere? How can children study without a decent environment?" she asked.

According to Ranjita, the school grounds remain underwater for nearly half the year, leaving children with nowhere to play. The adjacent road becomes their only open space, exposing them to passing vehicles.

Reaching school during the monsoon is another ordeal, while prolonged disruptions to classes add to the students' difficulties.

Livestock farming, another important source of rural income, has also suffered.



In Kalishakul village, less than 500 metres from a sluice gate, farmland has remained underwater through successive crop seasons. More than 250 families have been unable to cultivate their land, pushing them into years of hardship.

According to residents, the number of cattle, goats and other farm animals has fallen by more than half.

With grazing land submerged for months, grass has become scarce. Families must buy fodder at higher prices, an expense many can no longer afford. Some have abandoned livestock rearing altogether, while poultry farming has also declined.

The losses go beyond the income these animals generate. For rural households, cattle and goats are valuable assets that can be sold during financial emergencies. As livestock disappears from homesteads, families are losing an important safeguard against hardship.

Although residents trace the severe waterlogging to around 1986, the origins of the crisis lie in changes to the region's water management system decades earlier.

In the 1960s, the Coastal Embankment Project introduced polders, embankments and sluice gates to protect farmland from tidal flooding. In Bhabadah, embankments narrowed the Teka-Hari-Shree river system.

A 21-vent sluice gate, the largest among 282 installed in the southwestern region, was built at Bhabadah, alongside another with six vents. The system was intended to drain water from the Teka-Mukteshwari, Hari, Upper Bhadra and Buribhadra basins.

But the infrastructure altered the natural movement of water and sediment.

Before the embankments were built, tidal water carried sediment into the beels, gradually raising their beds. Once tidal flows were restricted, sediment increasingly accumulated in the rivers instead, raising their beds and obstructing the drainage of water from surrounding low-lying areas.

The infrastructure meant to protect farmland thus contributed to the very conditions that have kept it submerged for decades. Monsoon rainfall, deteriorating sluice gates and man-made barriers in canals and rivers have made matters worse.

Successive governments have spent hundreds of crores of taka trying to restore drainage, but lasting relief has remained elusive.

According to the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB), 21 government-funded projects have been undertaken to improve drainage in the region.

Among them were the Tk 229-crore Khulna-Jashore Drainage Rehabilitation Project in 1996, a Tk 252-crore drainage project in 2002, and a Tk 69-crore Tidal River Management (TRM) project in Beel Khukshia in 2006.

Another TRM project, proposed for Beel Kapalia, received an allocation of Tk 71 crore in 2011 but was never implemented because of disputes over compensation.

The current programme includes a Tk 140-crore project to re-excavate an 81.5-km stretch of the Hari, Teligati, Upper Bhadra, Teka and Shree rivers under the supervision of the Bangladesh Army.

It also includes Tk 33 crore for excavating 24 canals, Tk 45.41 crore for expanding drainage and irrigation facilities, and Tk 49 crore for rehabilitating the Amdanga canal. A further Tk 280-crore proposal for sediment management is awaiting approval, according to BWDB officials.

Yet, despite the repeated interventions and substantial expenditure, the same question persists: why has Bhabadah remained waterlogged?

One major concern is the absence of a lasting strategy to manage sediment after excavation. Dredging may temporarily restore a river's depth, but without measures to maintain water flow and control sediment accumulation, the riverbed can rise again.

Residents say waterlogging has returned soon after waterways were excavated, dashing their hopes of relief. Reports in 2026 also found that several areas remained waterlogged despite the Tk 140-crore excavation programme.

"Rivers need a sustained flow. They cannot be saved by excavation alone. They can be saved only by ensuring their flow," said Iqbal Kabir Zahid, chief adviser of the Bhabadah Water Drainage Movement Committee.

He warned that without TRM, rivers could soon fill with silt again, turning repeated excavation into an expensive cycle with little lasting benefit.

TRM seeks to restore the natural movement of water and sediment by allowing tidal water to enter a selected beel through a controlled route.

As the tide recedes, water flows back towards the river while sediment settles in the beel, gradually raising its bed. At the same time, the movement of tidal water can help restore the river's drainage capacity.

But TRM comes with its own challenges. Allowing tidal water into a designated beel can disrupt farming and livelihoods by keeping land flooded for prolonged periods. Its implementation therefore requires careful planning, hydrological studies, consultation with affected communities and fair compensation for landowners.

Residents and experts argue that successive interventions have placed greater emphasis on excavation than on implementing TRM on the scale they consider necessary.

While excavation can be measured in kilometres of waterways cleared, tidal management demands long-term planning, agreements over land use and sustained monitoring.

Without these, they argue, projects risk addressing the immediate effects of waterlogging rather than the conditions that cause it.

BWDB officials, however, maintain that the ongoing excavation and drainage works will improve the situation. They also said there were plans to install pumps for emergency drainage.

Residents question whether pumping could provide meaningful relief across such an extensive low-lying region. While pumps might help drain smaller areas temporarily, they believe restoring the natural drainage system is essential to resolving the wider crisis.

The challenge, however, is not simply choosing between excavation and TRM. Bhabadah needs a coordinated approach based on hydrological research, reliable data on river levels and sediment accumulation, and a thorough understanding of how water moves across the basin.

River excavation, canal restoration, sluice-gate maintenance and TRM may each have a role, but their effectiveness depends on how they work together.

For four decades, the consequences of fragmented interventions have been borne by people whose farmland remains submerged, whose children struggle to attend school and whose livelihoods have steadily diminished.

The true cost cannot be measured solely in the crores spent on excavation contracts. It also lies in harvests lost year after year, livestock sold or abandoned, interrupted education and families forced to leave their homes.

For residents of Kapalia Beel and the surrounding villages, another project will mean little unless it brings lasting change.



PHOTOS: **HABIBUR RAHMAN**

During the monsoon, water rises further, spilling into homes, submerging courtyards and living rooms.



More than 200 educational institutions in the region remain submerged for around three months a year, sometimes longer, disrupting lessons and making it difficult for children to attend school.



Can Khulna become a city of opportunity again?

Khulna's outward urban expansion has increased pressure on agricultural land, drainage systems and essential services, raising concerns about the city's long-term sustainability and the need for more integrated urban planning.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

MD. ASHIQ UR RAHMAN

Cities have historically grown around economic opportunities. Industrialisation, trade and commerce have attracted people, generated employment and shaped urban settlements. The Industrial Revolution transformed cities across Europe, while manufacturing-led development subsequently accelerated urbanisation in many Asian countries. Bangladesh has experienced a similar relationship between industrial development and urban growth, although the trajectories of individual cities have differed considerably.Khulna is a particularly revealing example of what happens when a city's economic foundations weaken while its urban challenges continue to multiply.

As we observe World Cities Day, it is worth asking a fundamental question: What should urban planning achieve in a city where industries have declined, formal employment opportunities have contracted, informal livelihoods have expanded and climate-induced migration has placed additional pressure on housing, infrastructure and urban services?

Khulna was once one of Bangladesh's most important industrial centres. Its strategic location, river connections, proximity to Mongla Port and access to the resources of the southwestern region supported the development of jute, textile, paper, newsprint, match and other manufacturing industries. Industrial establishments in Khalishpur, Daulatpur and adjoining areas generated employment and attracted workers from surrounding districts

Our research on deindustrialisation and urban decline in Khulna demonstrates how closely industrial development and urbanisation were connected. The establishment of major industries in Khalishpur during the 1950s and 1960s transformed a relatively sparsely populated area into a thriving industrial township. At one stage, approximately 30,000 workers were employed in the mills, while an estimated 100,000 people depended directly on these industries.

Planned residential neighbourhoods, workers' housing, educational institutions, healthcare facilities, markets and transport networks developed around this industrial economy. The Khalishpur Housing Estate illustrates how employment generation and planned urban development were once closely linked.

However, the gradual decline of traditional industries, particularly from the late twentieth century onwards, reshaped the city's economy. The closure of major industrial establishments and the loss of manufacturing employment weakened the economic base that had supported generations of urban households. The closure of state-owned jute mills in 2020 further exposed the vulnerability of Khulna's industrial economy.

Our research suggests that this deindustrialisation was not simply a natural transition from manufacturing towards a more advanced service economy. Rather, it reflected a combination of changes in industrial policy, inadequate modernisation, declining competitiveness, institutional weaknesses and failures in industrial management. Unlike cities where manufacturing employment was progressively replaced by productive service-sector opportunities, Khulna experienced industrial decline without sufficient economic diversification to compensate for the loss of industrial activity and employment.

Yet the decline of formal industries did not eliminate the need for livelihoods. Instead, many households increasingly turned to informal economic activities, including street vending, small-scale trading, transport services, home-based enterprises, casual labour and other forms of self-employment.



A worker produces jute sacks at Crescent Jute Mills in Khalishpur, Khulna. The decline of traditional industries has left the city struggling with lost employment opportunities and a weakened industrial economy.

PHOTO: DIPANKAR ROY

Our research on the informal economy in Khulna indicates that informal enterprises are not simply the products of individual entrepreneurial choice. They are shaped by limited formal employment opportunities, low barriers to entry, migration, family and social networks, and the difficulties people face in entering the formal economy. Informality has become both a survival mechanism for many households and an important source of urban economic activity.

This presents a challenge for conventional urban planning. Most master plans concentrate on land-use zoning, roads, housing and physical infrastructure, but pay comparatively little attention to how people earn their living, particularly those who depend on informal employment. A city cannot become sustainable simply by allocating land for residential, commercial and industrial purposes. It must also create and protect opportunities for people to work and earn a decent living.

Khulna's challenges became more complex following Cyclone Sidr in 2007 and Cyclone Aila in 2009. Salinity intrusion, waterlogging and prolonged livelihood insecurity pushed many affected households towards urban centres, including Khulna, in search of alternative livelihoods and greater economic security.

For many migrants, Khulna was a place where they hoped to rebuild their lives. But they arrived in a city where formal employment opportunities were already limited. Consequently, many became dependent on informal livelihoods and sought accommodation in low-income settlements, rented rooms and environmentally vulnerable locations. The resulting urban poverty cannot be understood simply as a consequence of migration; it reflects the interaction between industrial decline, limited economic diversification, inadequate affordable housing and the growing impacts of climate change.

The spatial consequences are increasingly visible. Khulna has experienced peripheral development, the conversion of agricultural and low-lying land, fragmented residential expansion, growing pressure on drainage systems and uneven access to urban services. This produces an apparent paradox: a city can experience outward physical expansion even while its traditional economic base contracts and some established neighbourhoods lose population or economic activity.

The problem is not simply that Khulna is growing without planning. It is that planning has not adequately responded to the changing relationships among the city's economy, population, environment, and spatial development. In our earlier research on urban sustainability and strategic planning in Khulna, we identified significant gaps between the stated ambitions of strategic planning and its actual implementation. Although the city's planning framework embraced the language of sustainability, insufficient attention was given to social justice, employment generation, public participation, marginalised communities and equitable access to infrastructure and essential urban services.

These weaknesses remain highly relevant today. A more fundamental issue is our limited understanding of what previous plans have actually achieved. Yet can any responsible authority confidently state what percentage of the policies, proposals and development interventions contained in these plans have actually been implemented? How many recommendations have been realised, how many remain unimplemented, and what explains the gap between planning and implementation? Unless implementation is systematically evaluated, we risk repeating the same proposals in successive plans without learning from previous failures or understanding the institutional and financial barriers that have prevented their implementation.

The transition from industrial employment to informal livelihoods is one of the most important, yet insufficiently recognised, dimensions of Khulna's urban development and its changing economic landscape.

WHAT KIND OF PLANNING DOES KHULNA NEED?

Khulna requires a shift from conventional land-use planning towards an integrated, strategic and people-centred approach that simultaneously addresses economic restructuring, climate resilience and social inclusion. However, this does not mean abandoning the traditional relationship between industrialisation and urban development. On the contrary, Khulna's experience reinforces the importance of industry-led urbanisation supported by effective urban planning.

First, urban planning must become an instrument of economic regeneration. Khulna needs a coherent strategy for revitalising its industrial economy while diversifying into emerging sectors. Its connections with Mongla Port, regional transport corridors, universities and the surrounding agricultural and coastal economies offer opportunities for new investment in logistics, agro-processing, light manufacturing and knowledge-based enterprises.

However, infrastructure investment alone will not guarantee economic regeneration. Planning must identify where employment can be created, what skills are required, how former industrial workers can be supported and how new economic activities can be connected to existing neighbourhoods. Particular attention should be given to the forward and backward linkages of industrial development. Industries do not operate in isolation. They depend on agricultural production, raw materials, transport, logistics, supporting enterprises, markets and services. Khulna's future industrial development must therefore be planned in relation to the wider regional economy rather than through isolated industrial estates or infrastructure projects.

The redevelopment of underutilised industrial land should be approached strategically. Such sites could accommodate new industries, enterprise clusters, training facilities, mixed-use developments and public amenities, provided that environmental risks, land ownership issues and community interests are properly addressed.

Another important consideration is Bangladesh's demographic dividend and Khulna's ability to benefit from it. Our research on deindustrialisation in Khalishpur reveals a striking contradiction. Industrialisation once attracted workers from different parts of the country and created employment opportunities for thousands of households. The subsequent closure of industries, however, forced many workers into low-paid informal activities, while others, particularly younger and more mobile workers, migrated elsewhere in search of employment. Instead of transforming its human resources into greater economic productivity, Khulna has struggled to retain and productively use its workforce.



Homes damaged by Cyclone Aila in coastal southwestern Bangladesh in 2009. The disaster, along with salinity intrusion and prolonged livelihood insecurity, forced many coastal families to seek alternative livelihoods in urban centres, including Khulna.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

This raises a critical question for urban planning: how can Khulna benefit from Bangladesh's demographic dividend without rebuilding its productive economic base? The demographic dividend is not an automatic consequence of having a large working-age population. It requires investment in education, technical skills, industrial diversification, entrepreneurship and employment-generating economic activities. Urban planning must therefore go beyond allocating land for industries and housing to create the spatial and economic conditions necessary for productive employment.

Second, the informal economy must be recognised as an integral part of the city rather than treated as an obstacle to urban development. Evictions, restrictive zoning and the displacement of informal activities do not eliminate informality; they merely transfer hardship from one location to another. Urban planning should instead provide designated, appropriately located vending spaces, neighbourhood markets, affordable workspaces, access to essential services, and practical pathways towards greater economic security.

Third, Khulna must adopt a more inclusive approach to housing and settlement development. Our research on the Greenland informal settlement demonstrates the importance of community networks and collective action in improving the living conditions of the urban poor. However, community participation must extend beyond consultation or temporary project-based arrangements. Rather than relying primarily on relocation or conventional housing estates, the city should promote in-situ settlement upgrading, affordable rental housing, incremental housing improvements and community-supported housing initiatives. Such measures are particularly important for low-income workers and climate migrants who cannot afford housing in the formal market.

Fourth, Khulna must reconsider its pattern of outward urban expansion. The continued conversion of agricultural land for residential and commercial development threatens the productive rural economy surrounding the city. Agricultural land is not simply vacant land awaiting urban development. It supports food production, employment, ecological functions and the forward and backward linkages that connect rural production with urban markets and industries. Protecting productive agricultural land should therefore become a core principle of metropolitan planning. Rather than encouraging fragmented peripheral expansion, Khulna should pursue carefully planned urban densification, particularly in areas where infrastructure and services already exist or can be efficiently improved.

Densification, however, should not be confused with overcrowding. It must be accompanied by adequate drainage, open spaces, transport infrastructure, affordable housing and essential public services.

Fifth, climate resilience must become a central organising principle of urban development. Khulna's low-lying geography and exposure to waterlogging, flooding, salinity intrusion and extreme weather events demand an approach that respects the city's natural drainage systems and ecological characteristics. Land-use decisions must therefore be informed by flood exposure, drainage capacity and ecological sensitivity. Climate adaptation should also extend beyond embankments, drainage channels and other engineering infrastructure. It must address the social and economic vulnerabilities of people living in environmentally exposed settlements, particularly those whose livelihoods are already insecure.

Sixth, Khulna needs stronger metropolitan coordination. The city's economic and environmental systems extend beyond the administrative boundaries of Khulna City Corporation. Yet responsibilities for planning, infrastructure, services and environmental management remain distributed among multiple institutions. The Khulna Development Authority, Khulna City Corporation, development agencies, neighbouring local governments and relevant national institutions need a coordinated framework for metropolitan development, with clearly defined responsibilities, institutional roles and effective mechanisms for implementation.

Most importantly, planning must become a continuous process of strategic decision-making rather than a periodic exercise in preparing master plans. In this context, Entrepreneurial Planning and Management (EPM) offers an important complementary approach. International experience, including the regeneration of London's Docklands, demonstrates how strategic public-sector leadership, institutional coordination, infrastructure investment and private-sector participation can help transform declining industrial areas into new centres of economic activity.

The relevance of EPM for Khulna lies not in replicating the physical development model of the Docklands, but in recognising that planning authorities must become active facilitators of investment, economic restructuring and implementation rather than remaining primarily regulators of land use. However, entrepreneurial planning must be accompanied by effective safeguards against speculative land development, displacement, environmental degradation and the exclusion of low-income communities. Economic regeneration should generate productive employment and shared urban benefits rather than merely increase land values or encourage commercially driven development.

A strategic planning approach would allow Khulna to identify its most pressing challenges, establish shared priorities, mobilise institutional and community resources, implement targeted interventions and regularly assess their outcomes. This approach must be supported by genuine public participation. Residents of informal settlements, industrial workers, women, small entrepreneurs, climate migrants, businesses, universities and civil society organisations should all have meaningful opportunities to influence decisions about the future of their city.

Equally important is establishing a transparent system for monitoring the implementation of urban plans. Every major planning proposal should have clearly identifiable responsibilities, implementation timelines, financing arrangements and measurable outcomes. Periodic public reporting on the implementation of master plans and development strategies would strengthen institutional accountability and allow future planning decisions to be informed by evidence rather than assumptions. Khulna's experience also offers an important lesson for urbanisation across Bangladesh. Cities cannot depend indefinitely on their historical economic advantages.

As we mark World Cities Day, Khulna presents an opportunity to reconsider what planning is ultimately meant to achieve. The objective should not simply be to produce a more orderly physical city, but to create an economically productive, socially inclusive and environmentally resilient urban future. Khulna's next chapter should be shaped not by the industries it has lost or the vulnerabilities it has inherited, but by a development vision that connects industrial regeneration, productive employment, demographic opportunities, agricultural land protection, social justice, community participation and climate adaptation.

The future of Khulna will depend not on how much land we develop, but on how effectively we plan for the people who live and work on it.

Dr Md Ashiq Ur Rahman *is a professor of Urban and Rural Planning at Khulna University. His research focuses on urban poverty, informal economies, housing and sustainable urban development.*

WORLD CITIES DAY

A manifesto for Bangladesh's future cities

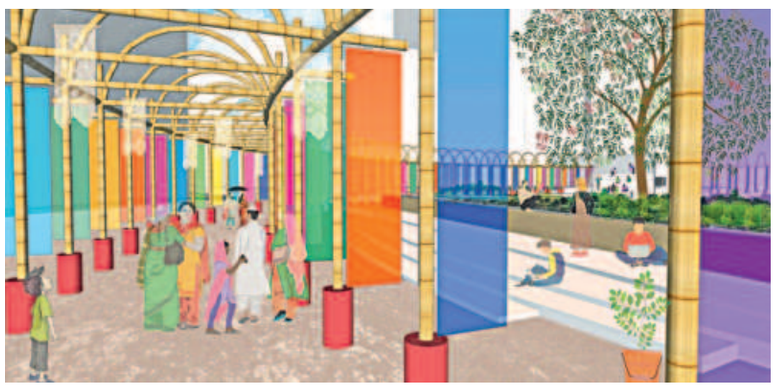
KAZI KHALEED ASHRAF

In Dhaka, we live and work in the densest city on the planet. Day by day, we are making it more unliveable and unbearable. Every year, rather ingloriously, we are awarded some regrettable labels. And the show goes on.

The current crisis in Dhaka is the product of three failures: a lack of vision among national policymakers, poor planning by planners, and even poorer management by city managers. Dhaka's fate is repeated in other cities and towns across the country. Every town wants to be a mini Dhaka. The narrative needs to change. We need to develop a fresh vision of what we want our cities to be.

For too long, the discourse on our cities has been dominated by economic, statistical or technocratic parameters. Useful only for managing the techno-functional aspects of cities, such parameters limit our understanding of the city's fullest human, social, aesthetic and ecological potential. In approaching the future city, we need to embrace a more proactive and positive notion of the city. We need to consider the city as a cultural and existential form, an essential human innovation in how we should live together. I have argued that such an idea is best represented by the term "urbanism", rather than urbanisation.

On a number of occasions, in this newspaper and elsewhere, I have described what urbanism may mean for Bangladesh and tried to map out



Gulshan Circle reimagined as a pop-up public space.

a future for our cities on that basis. In 2012, I presented my ideas in the book Designing Dhaka: A Manifesto for a Better City and delineated further ideas for Dhaka and other cities in numerous articles and features. At the risk of repeating some topics, I list them here in summary form.

Water is foundational. An urbanism for Bangladesh has to be conceptualised from the hydrological characteristics of the delta. For a while now, I have argued for an obvious but largely ignored idea: that water intelligence should be the basis for developing our cities. Most conventional planning considers the city from a high and dry vantage point. I call this "dry planning": the city is considered civilised if it is dry, even if that creates inequity in the allocation of resources and a class distinction between those who are dry and those who are wet. In this scenario, what is wet is seen as primitive and backward. The outcome: water, as the basis of a rich, environmentally attuned life, has evaporated. The river has become a dirty drain. The wetland has become a swamp. And the monsoon has become just a miserable season.

Planning around land and water, rather than land versus water, should be the natural recourse in our deltaic landscape. A Bengali urbanism can show that this historic opposition can be overcome. An audacious vision for such cities has to begin with the precious landscape of waterways, wetlands and agricultural terrain, which forms the natural foundation of our nation-state. Such a vision can integrate urbanism, hydrology, agriculture, infrastructure and flooding into a new city form.

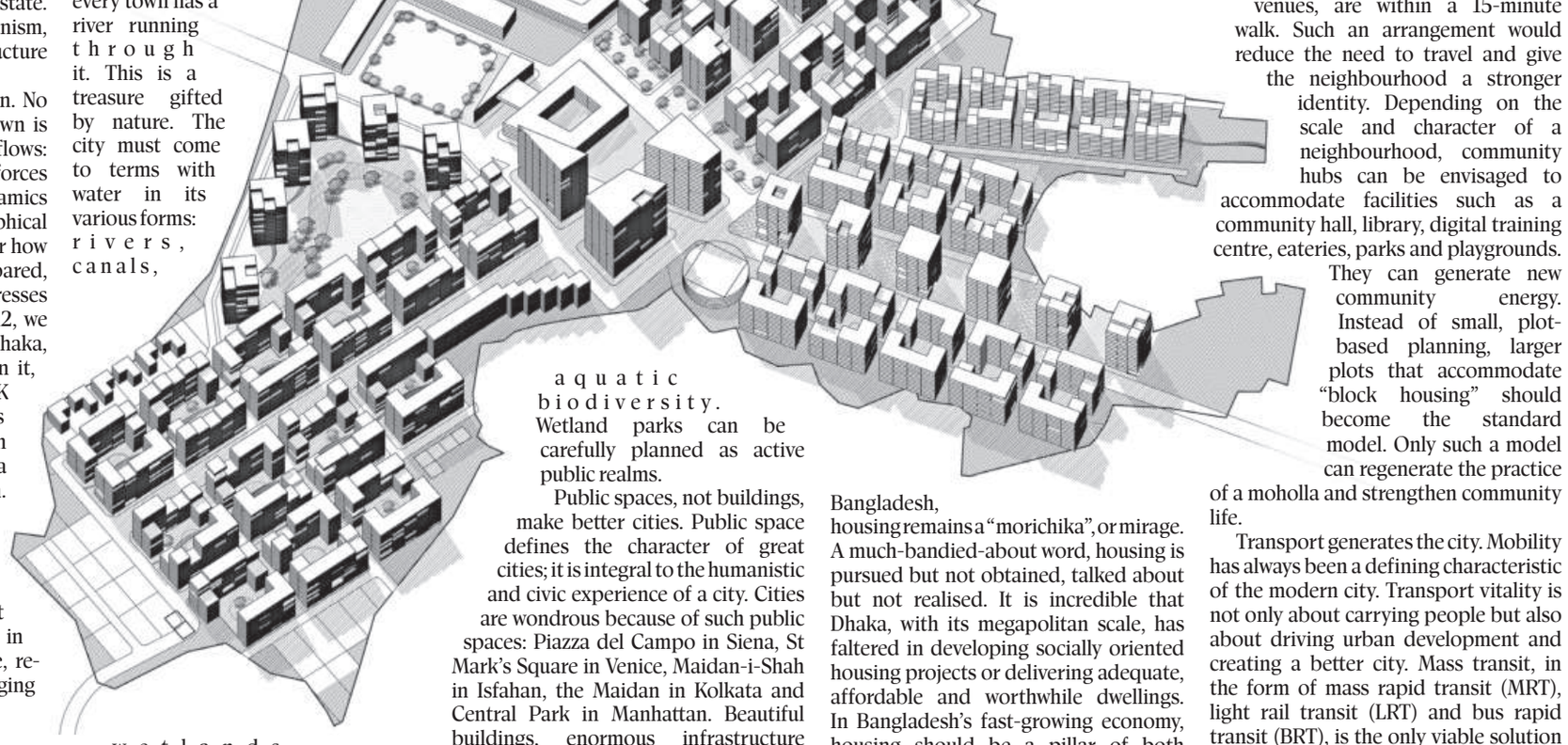
Every city needs a regional plan. No town is an island. Each city or town is intimately linked to a network of flows: of people, information, economic forces and, above all, hydrological dynamics that extend beyond the geographical boundaries of that town. No matter how carefully a plan for a city is prepared, it remains limited unless it addresses the larger regional context. In 2012, we proposed a regional plan for Dhaka, which we called "Dhaka Nexus". In it, a metropolitan core (the RAJUK area) and satellite settlements (extending to Kaliakoir in the north and Mawa in the south) create a planned polycentric constellation. This development depends on the urban intensification of the satellite towns around Dhaka and the development of a multimodal transport system. We envisage that the arrangement will be effective in de-centring the metropolitan core, re-clustering urban centres and managing their population density.

The five-million city. The future of Dhaka lies outside Dhaka. A consolidated national plan is required to manage the wild urbanisation that defines the current situation. We need to configure settlement patterns carefully, as they create a footprint that disrupts agricultural land (affecting food security), as well as wetlands and floodplains (harming ecological conditions and biodiversity). Planned clustering and distribution of the future population will be essential for sustainable economic and social development. Through a process I call "distributed urbanism", Bangladesh can plan for "metro-cities" beyond Dhaka in anticipation of a growing national population. We can plan five "metro-hubs" with 5 million people each, 10 medium-sized cities with more than 1 million people each, and 40 smaller towns with 0.5 million people each. All of these hubs can be developed by intensifying existing towns. The footprint of a settlement depends on its population and density. For a future redistribution of the population, the metro-cities can have a density of 20,000 people per square kilometre, requiring a footprint of 250 sq km (for a total population of 5 million). The medium-sized and smaller cities can have densities of 10,000 and 8,000 people per sq km, with areas of 100 sq km and 60 sq km respectively.

Follow the flow. Bangladesh's urban reality is that almost every town has a river running through it. This is a treasure gifted by nature. The city must come to terms with water in its various forms: rivers, canals, wetlands, floodplains and ponds. What a beautiful city that would be! All physical planning should begin from the premise that a river constitutes a vast ecosystem, even when it runs through a city or town, and that rivers are defined by the flow of water. In fact, the flow and overflow behaviour of a river constitutes a "water basin" extending over a large area in which the city or town is embedded. All water flow in a city is part of the interconnected water-basin system, from river and canal flows to urban drainage and water supply, and from floodplain ecology to aquifer recharge.

Riverbanks are natural public realms. Rivers are central to the ecological and hydrological matrix, and riverbanks provide a natural setting for a rich public realm and social life. Developing riverbanks as public spaces should be our unconditional priority. The entire stretch of an urban riverbank should be declared a public realm, which could then be developed into open public spaces with parks, gardens and public facilities. Riverbanks are natural sites for tree planting; some can even accommodate mini urban forests. We need exemplary design language and guidelines for redeveloping our urban riverbanks.

Framing the floodplains. A city like Dhaka is surrounded by rich terraqueous floodplains and wetlands. There is a constant battle between the ecological obligation to preserve the floodplains and the opposing economic pressure for invasive development. Landfilling and the gradual disappearance of terraqueous zones characterise a ruthless pattern of development. A middle ground can be found. To safeguard urban floodplains, we have envisaged dedicated peripheral building development along the demarcated edges of the floodplains, while conserving the floodplains to accommodate flooding, help recharge aquifers and promote aquatic biodiversity. Wetland parks can be carefully planned as active public realms.



◀ **A vision of the city as an ensemble of housing blocks and towers.**

ILLUSTRATION: **BENGAL INSTITUTE**

Public spaces, not buildings, make better cities. Public space defines the character of great cities; it is integral to the humanistic and civic experience of a city. Cities are wondrous because of such public spaces: Piazza del Campo in Siena, St Mark's Square in Venice, Maidan-i-Shah in Isfahan, the Maidan in Kolkata and Central Park in Manhattan. Beautiful buildings, enormous infrastructure projects and swanky developments are perhaps signs of a city's economic clout, but public spaces are what make a city experiential and humane. Plazas, "chottors", parks, fields and tree-filled gardens signify the "commons" for all: they are living rooms that provide a stage for the city's life and energy. If a plan for Dhaka aspires to be socially inclusive and humanistic, it should begin by giving generous attention to creating public spaces at all scales, from the city to the neighbourhood and even to the corner of a street.

The city belongs to pedestrians. We need a pedestrian-rich street life that is safe for all, especially women



A model of block housing incorporating shared community spaces.

and children. Only walkability can ensure a liveable and endearing city. Well-planned public spaces encourage walkability in the city. No matter how motorised and technologically advanced we become, the city ultimately belongs to the pedestrian, the human being on the street. A love for the city develops from walking through its streets and alleys. It is through the accessibility, discoveries and experiences of walking through the city that one acquires a fondness for it, a feeling I call "metrophilia". The success of a mass transit system relies on a well-developed pedestrian network, as people need to walk to stations to catch trains or buses.

Housing is a social fabric. In Bangladesh, housing remains a "morichika", or mirage. A much-bandied-about word, housing is pursued but not obtained, talked about but not realised. It is incredible that Dhaka, with its megapolitan scale, has faltered in developing socially oriented housing projects or delivering adequate, affordable and worthwhile dwellings. In Bangladesh's fast-growing economy, housing should be a pillar of both economic stability and public well-being; it affects productivity and quality of life. We have lamented since the 1990s that creating plots and individual buildings in the name of planning residential areas does not make for the best city, either in terms of the efficient use of land or the creation of communities. We need diversified housing forms in all our cities and towns, catering to all economic groups. Building and dwelling types, and their arrangement, create neighbourhoods and communities. The architecture of housing is not about "looks" but about how the spaces within housing units and the spaces that make up the public domain are knitted



A housing design that integrates shared social spaces to foster community life.

together into a harmonious fabric and eventually linked to the larger urban structure. It is this set of relationships that shapes the community spirit.

We need new neighbourhood forms. A sense of neighbourhood has historically defined the social cohesion of cities and contributed to the diversity of urban forms. In Dhaka, the original sense of a moholla has diminished because of the relentless drive towards plot-based apartment buildings and an increasing lack of shared facilities that strengthen community cohesion. The former mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, has championed the idea of a "15-minute city", in which key neighbourhood facilities, from schools and clinics to businesses and entertainment venues, are within a 15-minute walk. Such an arrangement would reduce the need to travel and give the neighbourhood a stronger identity. Depending on the scale and character of a neighbourhood, community hubs can be envisaged to accommodate facilities such as a community hall, library, digital training centre, eateries, parks and playgrounds. They can generate new community energy. Instead of small, plot-based planning, larger plots that accommodate "block housing" should become the standard model. Only such a model can regenerate the practice of a moholla and strengthen community life.

Transport generates the city. Mobility has always been a defining characteristic of the modern city. Transport vitality is not only about carrying people but also about driving urban development and creating a better city. Mass transit, in the form of mass rapid transit (MRT), light rail transit (LRT) and bus rapid transit (BRT), is the only viable solution to transport challenges, especially in a rapidly developing city such as Dhaka. Urban transport systems should be publicly oriented, designed for mass use and multimodal. No amount of investment in car-based infrastructure, such as widened streets, elevated roads and flyovers, will help resolve the crisis. While metropolitan cities need a comprehensive plan linking road, rail and river transport, smaller towns could plan ahead for mass transport systems such as LRT. Because any transit system is a driver of a city's development trajectory, stations along transport lines should be planned as new urban hubs with significant civic and commercial implications.

Small towns have a big future. Cities and towns can be diverse in nature and scale. We need a new vocabulary to understand the physiology and psychology of small towns before imposing development interventions. We need to acknowledge that a small town is not a miniature version of a big city; it has its own ontology. In generating new incentives for small towns, the first thing to understand is the scale of things: the clusters of buildings, their shapes and materiality, the character of streets and the overall quality of life. A small town is also an ecology; its footprint maintains a careful balance with the regional landscape of agriculture, floodplains and wetlands. The much-vaunted "green", a closeness to "nature" in the form of paddy fields or ribbons of rivers, can literally be glimpsed from one's window in such places. Specific rituals and festivals, artistic crafts, the production of various savouries, and musical or literary traditions give each town its distinct identity.

Kazi Khaleed Ashraf *is an architect, urbanist and writer. He directs the Bengal Institute for Architecture, Landscapes and Settlements.*



The riverbank envisioned as an ecological and social spine of the city.

ILLUSTRATION: **BENGAL INSTITUTE**

EdTech startups look beyond user growth

Online education platforms are offering alternatives to costly private tuition and coaching, but their long-term prospects depend on paying customers, measurable learning outcomes and access to technology

TAMANNA YESMIN MARIA *and*
MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR



PHOTOS: SABBIR BIN ABDULLATIF



The EdTech sector's future hinges on converting users into paying customers, demonstrating measurable outcomes and expanding access to technology.

High out-of-pocket spending remains a major burden for families in Bangladesh's education sector. When students do not learn enough in classrooms, many parents feel compelled to pay for private tutors and guidebooks, adding to the cost of education.

A 2024 report by Education Watch, a civil society platform of researchers, found that guidebook use rose sharply between 2022 and 2023.

By 2023, more than nine in 10 primary and secondary students used commercially available guidebooks, up from around eight in 10 a year earlier. Seven in 10 primary students and more than three-quarters of secondary students also received private tutoring.

Online education platforms are gradually offering another option.

Faria Zaman, an HSC graduate of New Government Degree College in Rajshahi preparing for university admission tests, has spent Tk 3,550 on an online package covering different science subjects through platforms including ACS and Physics Hunter. She is also taking an online admission preparation course rather than finding and paying separate teachers for six subjects.

"These online courses cost less and allow me to study from home in a more organised way," she said.

Israt Jahan Maliha, a user of 10 Minute School, also turned to online learning after finding conventional coaching inconvenient. Travelling to classes took time away from studying, and she did not always understand the lessons. Scheduled online classes help her organise her studies, while recorded lessons allow her to catch up.

Her mother, Sahanaz Akter, said online learning costs less and saves travel time. Her youngest daughter began using 10 Minute School in Class VIII, performed well in this year's SSC examination and started taking Class XI courses before being admitted to college.

Their experiences reflect the opportunity for education technology, or EdTech, to make learning more accessible while building a business around demand for affordable educational support.

FROM DEMAND TO INVESTMENT

The spread of 3G internet, which commercially launched in Bangladesh in 2013 and had largely penetrated the country by 2015, helped YouTube reach a wider audience and supported the growth of EdTech.

Other drivers include a young population, increased parental spending on education, geographical disparities in access to learning and a shortage of quality teachers outside urban centres.

These factors were highlighted in "Market-map: The State of EdTech in Bangladesh", a paper by Ayrin Ria published by Future Startup in March 2023.

The paper estimated the offline coaching market at Tk 25,000 crore, reflecting demand for supplementary support amid classroom shortcomings and examination competition.

The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the sector's growth. School closures forced students to learn online in 2020, and user adoption and capital investment rose significantly between 2020 and 2022, helping startups such as 10 Minute School and Shikho gain momentum.

But attracting students does not necessarily translate into a sustainable business.

Sajid Amit, an associate professor at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh and director of its Center for Enterprise and Society, estimates that disclosed investments in Bangladesh's EdTech startup sector total around $16 million to $18 million.

Much of the known funding is concentrated among a small number of companies, while reliable sector-wide figures on paying users and revenues remain difficult to obtain, he said.

10 Minute School says it has raised more than $6.5 million, while Shikho says it has raised over $8 million.

"The question today is not whether Bangladeshis will learn digitally. They clearly will," Sajid said. "The real question is what they will consistently pay for."

When classrooms reopened, some pandemic-era demand disappeared. Paid platforms also faced competition from schools, private tutors, coaching centres and free online content. Artificial intelligence has introduced another alternative, allowing students to obtain explanations and answers without buying a course.

"I think we sometimes confuse reach, engagement and willingness to pay," Sajid said. "Millions of users should not automatically be confused with a commercially sustainable business."

Nurul Hai, managing director and chief executive officer of Startup Bangladesh Limited, identified a similar challenge.

"Getting users is not always the hardest part. Converting them into paying users is much harder," he said.

Paying customers, retention, repeat purchases, revenue growth, customer acquisition costs, margins and learning outcomes provide a clearer picture of an EdTech company's prospects than registered-user numbers alone, he added.

THREE MODELS, ONE CHALLENGE

10 Minute School, Shikho and Chorcha are pursuing different approaches to attracting paying customers.

10 Minute School combines online education with physical centres. The company said it surpassed Tk 50 crore in annual revenue last year, with more than 50,000 paying students. Its revenue is now split roughly evenly between its hybrid English-learning business and fully online academic business.

The online operation continues to record low-double-digit year-on-year growth, said Abdullah Abyad Raied, its co-founder and chief technology officer.

Upskilling courses once accounted for around 40 percent of the company's revenue but now contribute less than 5 percent and operate largely "on autopilot", Raied said. He sees room for hybrid learning because online delivery can save time and reduce costs, while face-to-face learning can help improve outcomes.

Shikho, which started in 2019, saw downloads surge during the pandemic before much of that growth faded after educational institutions reopened, said its chief operating officer, Ishmam Chowdhury.

The company says more than four million learners from all 64 districts have registered on its platform, with more than 600,000 using it every month. Around 68 percent are from outside major cities. Its revenue increased more than eightfold between 2022 and 2025, Ishmam said.

"Good content and social media can bring millions of students to an app. Convincing a family to invest in a full year of learning is a question of trust, and trust in education comes from results," he said.

Shikho said 75 percent of its paid learners who sat for the SSC examination in 2025 achieved GPA 5, while nearly 6,000 of its students achieved GPA 5 in 2026. The figures are based on the company's own learner records. It also tracks study regularity, lesson and test completion, progress across individual concepts and examination results.

Chorcha has built its model around practice rather than primarily offering lectures.

"People don't pay for content, because content is now everywhere for free. People pay for experience and results," said its founder, Sanzid Raihan.

The idea came from his experience preparing for university admission in 2021. Despite having teachers, coaching and guidebooks, he struggled to find an easy way to practise and assess what he had learned.

Chorcha reports more than 2.5 million users and around 500,000 monthly active users. Around 100,000 students take tests on the platform daily, spending an average of 35 minutes there, according to Sanzid. Tests, competitions, leaderboards and its mascot, Cheero, encourage regular practice.

The company reported Tk 2.5 crore in revenue last year and currently generates around Tk 30 lakh a month. More than 100,000 students bought premium subscriptions last year, Sanzid said. The business is bootstrapped apart from a Tk 10 lakh grant under the ICT Division's iDEA Project.

Sanzid said the sector's early mistake was assuming that putting classroom lectures online would be enough. Technology alone did not reproduce the enjoyment and social experience of learning with others.

AI AND THE ACCESS GAP

Artificial intelligence is creating new opportunities and challenges. Faria said she had received incorrect answers from AI tools, while Maliha said they sometimes provided wrong information or omitted topics. Neither viewed AI as a replacement for structured learning.

Shikho has introduced Smart Class, which adds an AI layer to lessons, and Shikho AI, a Bangla AI tutor grounded in the national curriculum, Ishmam said.

"The first wave was about putting lessons online. The next wave is about understanding each learner," he said.

Data generated when students answer questions, practise and seek help can help identify learning gaps and determine what they should study next, he added.

Professor Shamim Al Mamun of Jahangirnagar University's Institute of Information Technology said much of the sector still relies on video lectures, live classes, multiple-choice questions and quizzes.

He called for greater use of technology to analyse student performance, identify learning difficulties and adapt teaching. He also urged more research into how Bangladeshi students learn and closer collaboration between EdTech companies and educational institutions.

Associate Professor Sajid cautioned against treating AI-generated answers as a substitute for learning.

"The problem is that having an answer is not the same as knowing how to think," he said, warning that students who delegate difficult intellectual tasks to AI risk missing opportunities to develop independent thinking.

Access remains another barrier.

Goutam Roy, a lecturer in STEM Education at Charles Sturt University in Australia, said online education can help reduce rural-urban learning gaps, lower costs and provide supplementary opportunities for middle- and low-income families. Students can also learn at their own pace.

However, unequal access to reliable, high-speed internet remains a major challenge.

Many students lack laptops or desktop computers, which are often necessary for effective study, while unreliable electricity is another concern in rural areas. Prolonged screen time can reduce physical activity, and online learning may limit face-to-face interaction and socialisation, Roy said.

Looking ahead, 10 Minute School's Raied sees hybrid learning as a major opportunity over the next three to five years.

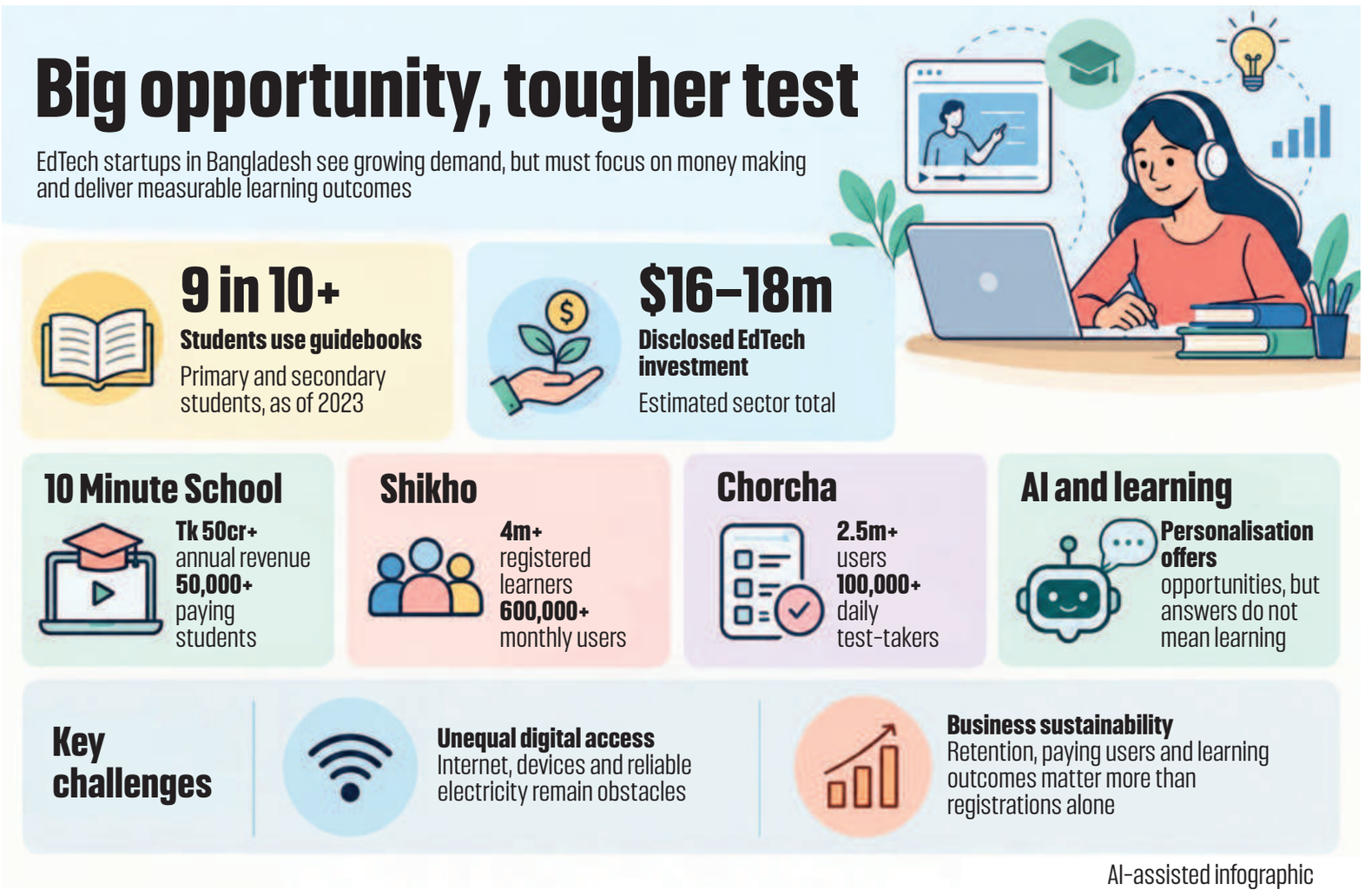
Associate Professor Sajid identifies potential in exam and admission preparation, English and employability skills, hybrid education, institutional and employer services, and AI-enabled learning.

Startup Bangladesh Limited's Nurul expects academic support and exam preparation to remain important alongside personalised AI learning, job-linked skills and institutional software.

For EdTech businesses, the challenge is to attract users who will pay, continue using their platforms and achieve learning outcomes, while generating enough revenue to cover the cost of acquiring and serving them.

Sajid described the sector's current phase as "consolidation with selective growth".

"I would not describe EdTech as dying," he said. "It is growing up."



AI-assisted infographic