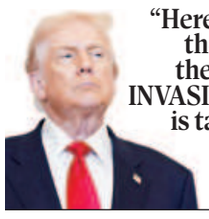
DHAKA SATURDAY NOVEMBER 14, 2026



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TRUMP on migrant caravans from Mexico

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WR3 | RECLAIMING RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

WR4 | WHERE OLD FURNITURE FINDS HOME

Party ties, family links, 'bribery' taint fertiliser dealership

SUKANTA HALDER

Allegations of political favouritism, nepotism, and bribery have clouded the appointment of fertiliser dealers across the country.

Party leaders, their relatives, and people who have little or no experience in the trade and warehouses of the required capacity have secured dealerships while many established traders were left out in many cases.

The allegations have emerged amid reports of fertiliser shortages in several districts, ahead of the Boro paddy season, which runs from January to June, and the ongoing winter vegetable season.

In parts of Rangpur division, unsuccessful applicants and party activists have alleged that bribes of up to 20 lakh were paid to secure appointments.



4,503 dealers appointed from 47,000 applicants

Many established traders reportedly left out

Warehouse eligibility under scrutiny

Agri minister promises investigation

More than 47,000 applications were submitted for around 5,000 dealership positions nationwide. Of these, 4,503 have been awarded, while 238 remain pending, according to the agriculture ministry.

Agricultural economist Jahangir Alam Khan warned that dealerships secured through nepotism or financial transactions could undermine efficiency, encourage corruption and keep qualified traders out of the business.

"Unsuitable or inexperienced dealers could worsen fertiliser shortages and threaten food security when global supply chain disruptions have already added to uncertainty," he said.

He called for a fresh investigation and the replacement of dealers found to have secured appointments through nepotism or bribery.

Agriculture Minister Mohammed Aminur Rashid said the government had followed a systematic, multi-level verification process.

"All complaints will be investigated and officials responsible for improper verification will be held accountable," he told The Daily Star.

'BRIBERY'

In Rangpur division, 567 dealerships were appointed across 536 unions and 31 municipalities in eight districts.

In Gangachara upazila, the wives of upazila BNP President Chand Sarkar and General Secretary Ayub Ali secured dealerships in Barabil and Gangachara Sadar unions.

Mizanur Rahman Lulu, the upazila BNP organising secretary, said he applied but was not recommended.

"For reasons unknown, my name was not recommended. Large sums of money changed hands in connection with the dealer appointments, and nepotism was widespread," he said, adding that dealers paid Tk 18 lakh to Tk 20 lakh for contracts.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5



An aerial view shows the nearly completed Kamalapur Metro Rail Station. With the viaduct connecting Motijheel and Kamalapur now in place, workers are putting the finishing touches on the station expected to open in July next year. The project marks a major step in extending the capital's Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) network to one of its busiest commercial and transport hubs. PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Delhi sticks to legal route on Hasina extradition

Avoids comment on reported return conditions

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

India has reiterated that Sheikh Hasina's extradition will be dealt with through legal channels, declining to comment on a BBC Bangla report that New Delhi has set two conditions for her return to Bangladesh.

According to the report published on Thursday, Indian officials have indicated that Bangladesh must arrange for the former prime minister's return through its military.

As Hasina arrived in India aboard a Bangladesh military aircraft on August 5, 2024, the Bangladesh Army would have to take her back, either by sending an aircraft to Delhi or receiving her at a designated point along the land border. India is prepared to make the necessary logistical arrangements, the report said.

The second condition is that Bangladesh must guarantee Hasina the opportunity

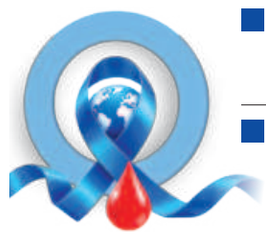
SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

7 in 10 with diabetes unaware of condition

Experts urge early detection amid rising cases

UNDIAGNOSED DIABETES

- **In 2022**
  67% of women and 72% of men had high blood glucose but were unaware of it
- **In 2017-18**
  59% of women and 61% of men were unaware



AWARENESS AND BLOOD GLUCOSE CONTROL – BDHS 2022

- **6%** of women and **5%** of men knew they had diabetes, kept their blood glucose levels under control
- **4%** of women and **5%** of men were aware of their elevated blood glucose levels but were not taking medication

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Shaheen Ahmed, who works at a private organisation, had never checked his blood sugar levels, believing that his daily long walks made him unlikely to develop diabetes.

However, in September 2020, he was surprised to learn that he had diabetes when a medical test revealed the condition before he underwent a major medical procedure. As a result, the procedure was delayed for several days.

"Although my parents had diabetes, I never checked my blood sugar levels because I never felt the need. I only came to know about it at a critical time," Shaheen, 54, told The Daily Star recently.

This is not an isolated case. It reflects a wider situation in Bangladesh, where around 70 percent

SEE PAGE 5 COL 4

Eight sued over fire at Nusrat's Kushtia home

Attempted murder case filed; probe team inspects site

STAR REPORT



The home ministry probe team visited the fire-damaged ancestral home of lawmaker Nusrat Tabassum in Kushtia yesterday.

The fire incident took place early Thursday, which Nusrat described as a "premeditated act of arson".

The lawmaker filed an attempted murder case against eight leaders of banned Chhatra League and affiliated organisations of Awami League, whose political activities are now banned, and 25-30 others unnamed.

The committee visited the house in Bagowan village of Daulatpur upazila in the afternoon, inspected different rooms, and spoke to locals.

Ahmed Mahbub-ul-Islam, deputy director (local government) of Kushtia and head of the committee, said, "We have found some clues and fragmented pieces of information. We have yet to find anything conclusive."

The four-member committee, which was formed on Thursday, has been asked to complete the probe within three days.

Other members are Maj Mohammad Asrarul Haque, additional director (operations) of BGB's Kushtia sector; Delwar Hossain, additional superintendent of police (Bheramara circle); and Wadud Hossain, assistant director of Kushtia Fire Service and Civil Defence.

On Thursday night, Nusrat, joint convener of National Citizen Party and lawmaker from the reserved seat for women, lodged the case with Daulatpur Police Station, accusing eight leaders of Jubo League, Swechchhasebak League, and BCL and 25 to 30 unidentified people of setting fire to the house and attempting to kill her family members.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



LOCAL POLLS

Khelafat Majlis mulls alliance without Jamaat

MAMUNUR RASHID

Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis is considering forming a separate electoral alliance with other Islamic parties, excluding Jamaat-e-Islami, if the latter insists on contesting local government elections independently, raising the possibility of a fresh realignment among Islamic parties.

The party fears that separate participation would split opposition votes and weaken unity within the Jamaat-led 11-party alliance. It is also exploring cooperation with Islamic parties outside the alliance.

Khelafat Secretary General Jalaluddin Ahmed told The Daily Star that his party wanted the alliance to contest the local polls together. If Jamaat refused, it could consider an alternative alliance.

"Contesting separately would create two problems. First, our votes would be divided, benefiting the ruling party. Second, separate candidates could affect the unity, cordiality and goodwill among us. During elections, we would have to speak against and compete with one another's candidates, creating distance and divisions within the alliance," he said.

Jalaluddin proposed central coordination in selecting candidates. For instance, among the 10 city corporations, parties with stronger organisational presence and public support in particular areas could be allowed to field candidates.

However, Jamaat leaders have repeatedly expressed their intention to contest independently, prompting alliance partners to select candidates on their own, he said.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1



PHOTO: PMO

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, accompanied by his wife Zubaida Rahman, arrives at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka early yesterday after attending the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP31) in Antalya, Turkey.

Eatery vandalised over seating row

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A group of people attacked and vandalised Durbin Bangla restaurant in Dhaka's Mohakhali yesterday following a dispute over seating arrangements.

The incident took place around 11:00am in Amtoli, near Government Titumir College, leaving several people injured in clashes between the attackers and restaurant staff.

Banani Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mohammad Salahuddin said the trouble began when a group refused to wait in a queue for seats, leading to an argument and a scuffle with employees.

"We are yet to identify those who carried out the attack. No case has been filed yet," he said.

A police source, however, said a group of Titumir College students had refused to queue, triggering the clash.

The source said some locals, along with people from the nearby Korail and Sattola slums, later gathered and vandalised the restaurant, allegedly in support of the students.

Restaurant owner Shafin Baig said

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Eight sued

FROM PAGE 1

The accused are Mir Ahsanul Islam Abhi, president of Kushtia district BCL, and Papu Shahriar Arnab, general secretary of the unit; Ashik Shikdar, president of Daulatpur upazila BCL; and Md Ridoy, joint convener of the same unit; Mir Saiful, president of Kushtia district Jubo League; and Harun-or-Rashid, general secretary of the unit; and Md Monirur Rahman Mohon, president of Daulatpur upazila Swechchhasebak League; and Shariful Islam, general secretary of the unit.

In the case statement, Nusrat said the accused and their associates had been conspiring to create instability in the area through criminal activities since the fall of the AL government on August 5, 2024, amid a student-led mass uprising.

The NCP leader also alleged that they had been looking for chances to kill her and her family members while spreading propaganda about her and the party on Facebook.

Nusrat was in Dhaka when the fire incident took place.

According to the case statement, her parents, Md Abdul Halim, 61, and Johura Khatun, 58, woke up around 12:15am after hearing three loud explosions. They came out of their rooms and found the house engulfed in flames.

The MP alleged that the accused, along with their associates, used bomb-like objects to set fire to the house and detonated three explosive devices in an attempt to burn her family members alive.

The fire destroyed furniture, household appliances, and other belongings. Five of the house's eight rooms were gutted. Three goats kept at the house died in the blaze, said the case statement.

Nusrat estimated the damage at around Tk 40 lakh.

[Our Kushtia correspondent contributed to this report.]

Delhi sticks to legal route on Hasina

FROM PAGE 1

to appeal against her death sentence and ensure a fresh trial over the killings during the July uprising.

Hasina fled to India amid the youth-led mass uprising and has been living there since. She was sentenced to death in November 2025 for crimes against humanity committed during the uprising.

Bangladesh has formally sought her extradition twice, first through a diplomatic note verbale in December 2024 and again after the death sentence was handed down in November 2025.

The foreign minister also raised the issue at a bilateral meeting last April, a foreign ministry official said, adding that India had not responded to Bangladesh's extradition requests.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, the official said Dhaka had received no communication from India about the reported conditions.

"We are not aware whether the Indian side made any such request at the political level. Diplomats were also not involved in discussions when she left Bangladesh in 2024," the official added.

At a biweekly media briefing in New Delhi yesterday, Randhir Jaiswal, spokesperson for India's Ministry of External Affairs, was asked about Hasina's extradition and the two reported conditions.

"What I refer to as a legal matter is the extradition part. And the extradition will be dealt with accordingly. On the other part of your question, I have no comments to offer," he said.

Diplomatic sources in New Delhi said Hasina's continued presence in India had become an obstacle to the Indian government's "neighbourhood first" policy, with the delay in improving ties also drawing domestic criticism.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, a diplomat said Prime Minister Tarique Rahman had yet to visit India, nearly a year into his tenure, and was instead moving closer to Türkiye, China and Pakistan, causing discomfort in New Delhi.

The diplomat said a visit would depend on the creation of a conducive environment and the fulfilment of certain preconditions.

"Hasina is not the Dalai Lama. She sought shelter in India when she was in distress, and India provided it. But India cannot afford to keep her indefinitely. She has been advised to use back channels to negotiate and secure the best possible deal for her return," the diplomat said.

On the postponement of the Bangladesh-India consular dialogue, Jaiswal said India wanted to maintain a positive, constructive and forward-looking relationship with Bangladesh.

He cited meetings under existing bilateral mechanisms covering trade, railways, water resources, and border management.

The next round of the Bangladesh-India consular dialogue, which will also discuss revised travel arrangements, will take place on a mutually convenient date, he said.

"India remains ready to discuss all bilateral issues with Bangladesh through these existing mechanisms, including at the technical level," Jaiswal added.

Party ties, family links, 'bribery' taint fertiliser dealership

FROM PAGE 1

Ayub denied financial transactions, saying some party members were spreading misinformation to discredit the process. Chand Sarker could not reached for comments.

In Pirgachha, local BNP leaders and activists alleged that bribes had been paid for appointments in seven of the upazila's nine unions. The wives of upazila BNP President Aminul Islam Ranga and General Secretary Shariful Islam received dealerships in two unions.

Ranga acknowledged his wife's appointment but denied involvement in other appointments or financial dealings.

"Many party leaders and activists who failed to secure dealerships are spreading false information against us.

"There were no financial transactions involving us in the appointment of fertiliser dealers," he said.

BNP MP Rokon Uddin Babul, whose Lalmonirhat-2 constituency comprises Aditmari and Kaliganj upazilas, said he had received many complaints.

Dealers would be monitored for six months and their dealerships would be cancelled if they failed to distribute fertiliser properly, he added.

ABANDONED RICE MILL

In Brahmanbaria-1, BNP lawmaker Abdul Hannan's son Adnan Sadi, husband of the MP's younger sister, and wife of the MP's nephew were among those who secured dealerships.

A Daily Star investigation found that an old, abandoned rice mill near the MP's house had been listed as the warehouse for his son's dealership. Local sources said Hannan bought the land and established the mill years ago, when he was a union chairman, but it had remained closed for years.

Hannan disputed the information about the mill.

Asked whether his son, a student with no prior business experience, met the eligibility requirements, he pointed to party activists' deprivation under the previous government.

"Did we have the opportunity to do business over the past 17 years? The previous government did not even give us trade licences," he said.

In Kushtia, at least 50 of the 70 dealerships went to BNP-linked people or their relatives, including the son of district BNP Convener Md Kutub Uddin Ahmed and the brothers of the Sadar upazila BNP president and general secretary.

Kutub Uddin acknowledged seeking the dealership for his son. "My son was looking for a source of employment. When an opportunity to run an established business came up, I tried to secure it for him," he said.

The district agriculture office's deputy director, Md Shawkat Hossain Bhuiyan, said, "We have to work following the directives of the higher authorities of the government."

PARTY TIES, FAMILY LINKS

In Jhenaidah, an analysis showed that around 90 percent of the dealers appointed for 67 unions and six municipalities had no previous fertiliser business experience.

The list includes the younger brother, brother-in-law and the brother-in-law's wife of district BNP President and Zila Parishad Administrator MA Majid. Another appointee, Md Nazmul Haque Misu of Shimla-Rokonpur Union in Kaliganj, is a first cousin of Majid's wife.

Md Anwar Hossain, a caretaker at the district BNP office earning Tk 10,000 a month, secured a dealership in Saduhati Union.

Md Amir Hossain, organising secretary of the union BNP, was appointed in Halidhani Union. During an on-site inspection, the verification committee found paddy stored in the warehouse listed in his application.

The policy requires applicants to be permanent residents of the area and have an owned or leased warehouse with a capacity of at least 50 tonnes.

Majid did not respond to calls seeking comment. District BNP General Secretary Zahiduzzaman Mona and Deputy Commissioner Noman Hossain, who chairs the district fertiliser and seed monitoring committee, declined to comment.

In Rajshahi, a review of 85 newly appointed dealers found that most were BNP-affiliated or had family members in party politics. They include an upazila Chhatra Dal convener, an upazila BNP leader's brother and a municipal BNP secretary.

In Godagari's Basudebpur Union, unsuccessful applicant Ziaur Rahman said he was initially ranked first on the deputy commissioner's list but was later moved to third.

"My warehouse is the best in Basudebpur. I was initially placed first on the list prepared at the deputy commissioner's office. I do not know what happened afterwards, but I was moved down to third," he said.

Deputy Commissioner Kazi Shahidul Islam said the appointments would be reviewed if complaints were received.

HEATED EXCHANGE IN JS

Heated exchanges erupted in parliament on Wednesday after NCP MP Hasnat Abdullah alleged a "festival of irregularities" in fertiliser dealer appointments, citing Thakurgaon as an example.

He accused some reserved-seat MPs of issuing demi-official (DO) letters recommending preferred candidates for dealerships in exchange for money.

Agriculture Minister Mohammed Aminur Rashid and Chief Whip Nurul Islam Moni rejected the allegations.

Also on Wednesday, the agriculture minister told parliament that the government had allocated Tk 17,000 crore in fertiliser subsidies for FY2026-27, down from Tk 28,987.45 crore in the previous fiscal year.

Dealerships secured through nepotism or financial transactions could undermine efficiency, encourage corruption and keep qualified traders out of the business.

Jahangir Alam Khan
Agricultural economist

The country will need to import more than 46 lakh tonnes of fertiliser this fiscal year, as domestic production capacity stands at 12 lakh tonnes against an annual demand of 58 lakh tonnes.

In Thakurgaon, 28 of 31 newly appointed dealers across four upazilas are reportedly BNP leaders, activists, relatives or associates. Several allegedly lack trading experience or warehouses of the required capacity.

In Pirganj municipality, Shyamoli Akter, wife of upazila BNP Organising Secretary Rezwanul Haque, secured a dealership despite having no fertiliser trading experience, according to local residents.

In Ranishankoil, six of eight dealerships went to relatives of BNP, Jubo Dal and Chhatra Dal leaders. One appointee, Jahangir Alam, elder brother of a former Dhaka College Chhatra Dal leader, lives in Singapore.

He said he applied on his brother's advice after returning home on September 5.

District BNP General Secretary Poygam Ali denied party influence, saying activists had long been denied business opportunities.

DAE Deputy Director Mazedul Islam said political affiliation was not considered.

Thakurgaon-2 MP Abdus Salam also denied involvement, saying unsuccessful applicants were making allegations. He said upazila nirbahi officers and the deputy commissioner handled the process, but any irregularities should be investigated.

[Our Rangpur Correspondent S Dilip Roy, Jhenaidah Correspondent Omar Ali Shohag, Rajshahi Correspondent Shohanur Rahman Rafi, Kushtia Correspondent Anis Mondol, Thakurgaon Correspondent Md Quamrul Islam Rubaiyat, and Brahmanbaria Correspondent Masuk Hridoy contributed to this report]

ROSSINI'S FIGARO
gets a modern makeover in Dhaka

RBR



My first introduction to the tongue-twister calls of Italian composer Gioachino Rossini's famous "Figaro! Figaro! Figaro!" was through a Tom and Jerry cartoon. You could say I am no opera aficionado, but then again, my forever love is that same iconic "Figaro!" shout in Queen's 1975 masterpiece Bohemian Rhapsody.

Anyway, leaving behind all that "do I know or do I not know" dilemma, I finally researched and learned who Figaro is and what he represents. In Rossini's The Barber of Seville (Il Barbiere di Siviglia), Figaro is introduced as the ultimate jack-of-all-trades -- acting as a local matchmaker,



PHOTO: COURTESY

apothecary, surgeon-assistant, and trusted problem-solver in Seville.

Overwhelmed by his own success, he sings lines like "Figaro here! Figaro there! Figaro up! Figaro down!" The rapid, repeated shouts act as a musical comedy bit showing just how chaotic and in-demand his life really is.

Phew, now with the literary background sorted, I finally got to witness the most energetic version of it live: Italian contemporary dance company Artemis Danza's production of Il Barbiere di Siviglia (The Barber of Seville), choreographed by Monica Casadei at Shilpakala Academy

Representing the Embassy of Italy in Dhaka for their second consecutive cultural visit to Bangladesh, the Italian delegation brought the company to perform on Thursday. With the Ministry of Cultural Affairs of Bangladesh, supported by funding from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI), the Italian Ministry of Culture, and the Emilia-Romagna Region, the international ensemble featured dancers from Italy alongside global collaborators working under Casadei's long-standing direction.

What makes this production truly remarkable is the company's signature ability to take classical Italian opera and reinterpret it dynamically through high-energy contemporary dance and physical theatre. Choreographed, set-designed, and an absolute superb lighting done by Monica Casadei, she reimagined Rossini's celebrated comic opera as a futuristic "action ballet".

In this modern interpretation, Figaro is multiplied across the entire ensemble of dancers of all genders. He sheds his charming 18th-century skin and morphs into the modern man who has an exhausting obsession with relentless speed, unyielding ambition, and toxic efficiency.

Original protagonist's pride in juggling an endless parade of odd jobs acts as a direct parallel to today's punishing gig economy and side-hustle culture, where personal self-worth is dangerously tied to non-stop productivity.

Meanwhile, those iconic, overlapping shouts of "Figaro! Figaro! Figaro!" stop sounding like playful opera and start sounding like the inescapable barrage of digital notifications. By translating his classic, boastful swagger into frantic, hyper-kinetic motion, Casadei's modern adaptation lays bare how Figaro's tireless hustle is just our own anxiety-driven race to survive an unforgiving, fast-paced world.

As the choreographer explains, "Opera is never truly ancient; while the composers lived in the past, the underlying human stories remain remarkably contemporary. By bridging tradition and the present, the performance demonstrates how dance transcends language barriers."

"By offering a fresh perspective on classical art forms, this contemporary reinterpretation allows audiences to connect emotionally with the characters' journeys, proving that opera can be experienced in a vibrant, accessible way for everyone," Casadei adds.

To bring this vision to life, the production blends Rossini's original score with contemporary electronic arrangements and original compositions created in collaboration with electronic composer Luca Vianini and complemented by costumes from Daniela Usai.

Fulfilling a global mission to connect with what the team calls the "other family" of dance, the company regularly collaborates with local artists across different continents, including Bangladeshi dance groups met during their previous and current visits.

Following this opening show in Dhaka, the company's Asian tour continued to the Chittagong Theatre Institute on Saturday, before heading onward to Singapore.

MY DHAKA

NATIONAL PUBLIC LIBRARY

A reading space lost to years of delay

Modernisation project only 66% complete after four years; deadline extended to June 2028

AYSHA TOFAIL *and* TAMANNA YESMIN MARIA

The Sufia Kamal National Public Library used to be more than just a place to find books for Imran Hasan, a former student of History at Dhaka University.

Hasan recalls regularly visiting the library to find study materials he could not afford and to have a quiet place to read.

"There, I could find the books I needed. The quiet atmosphere and spacious reading room made it an ideal place to concentrate, especially when I needed to study for long hours," he said.

Hasan, who now works at a development organisation, looks back on what is widely known as the central public library as a valuable resource that gave students like him access to knowledge regardless of their financial circumstances.

"For students who cannot afford to buy every book, a public library is an important resource. But sadly, I can no longer visit the library," he said.

More than four years after the old public library building in the capital's Shahbagh was demolished, construction of its

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1







Construction of the Sufia Kamal National Public Library in Shahbagh remains incomplete, more than four years after work began. The library is now operating from a temporary space on the 12th floor of the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh building in Ramna, where limited space has restricted access to books and reduced the number of visitors. The photos were taken recently. PHOTO: COURTESY, STAR

4-day nat'l debate fest begins at JU



JU CORRESPONDENT

A four-day national debate festival began at Jahangirnagar University yesterday, bringing together debaters from schools, colleges, and universities across the country.

The festival, titled National Debate Festival 2026, organised by the Jahangirnagar University Debate Organisation (JUDO), is being held under the slogan "Dhongsho Jontro Thamke Darak Praner Spordhay" (Let the machinery of destruction come to a halt in the face of life's defiance).

The festival features three debate competitions and a closing ceremony. A total of 32 schools, 32 colleges and 32 universities, with more than 500 people, including debaters and adjudicators, are participating in the festival.

The day-long 21st Inter-University Debate Competition was held yesterday featuring 32 teams from universities across the country, with four preliminary rounds, followed by quarter-finals and semi-finals.

The debates covered a range of subjects, including the rise of auteur cinema, whether developing countries should adopt a conservative approach to artificial intelligence (AI) technology, and whether developing countries should prioritise investment in primary and secondary education over public universities.

The 15th Inter-College Debate Competition and the Inter-School Debate Competition are scheduled for November 14

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

From hopes of a better life to descent into despair

After 32 years in Bahrain, Lilufa Begum returns home scarred by hardship, illness and imprisonment

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

When 53-year-old Lilufa Begum returned to Bangladesh on November 11 after spending 32 years in Bahrain, she could barely recall where her family lived or how to contact them.

Suffering from physical and mental health problems, she was handed over to BRAC by the expatriates' welfare desk at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

Hours later, her two sisters arrived at a BRAC centre in Dhaka. Although Lilufa struggled to communicate, she recognised them.

"She recognised us when we went to see her. She stretched out her hand towards us," her sister Mazeda Begum told The Daily Star.

Lilufa had left her village in Manikganj's Singair upazila in 1994, hoping to improve her family's financial condition. Her return marked the end of decades of separation, mental illness and imprisonment in Bahrain.

According to BRAC, Bahrain police found her wandering the streets in a mentally unstable condition. She was imprisoned for lacking valid documents before being repatriated on a travel pass.

Lilufa, from Sahrail village, initially worked as a house help in Bahrain for around four years. However, the middleman who arranged her migration took her earnings, leaving her unable to send money home, Mazeda said.

Later, her younger brother travelled to Bahrain and found her. She stayed with him and began supporting their parents financially.

"She used to send Tk 5,000 or Tk 10,000 whenever she could so that our parents could manage their expenses," Mazeda said.

Lilufa returned home on leave around 16 years ago before going back to Bahrain. Her mental health began deteriorating around four to five years ago, according to Mazeda.

Her brother, who still lives in Bahrain, visited Bangladesh around three months ago for his daughter's wedding. He told the family that Lilufa had become mentally unstable and was wandering the streets.

Mazeda last spoke to her sister around two months ago over their brother's phone.

"She never married. She has no husband or children. Our parents are no longer alive. She has no savings, no money, nothing. She is completely helpless," Mazeda said.

After her arrival, BRAC took Lilufa by ambulance to its learning centre in Uttara, where she received clothing, essential supplies, personal care and accommodation.

Lilufa had left her village in Manikganj's Singair upazila in 1994, hoping to improve her family's financial condition. Her return marked the end of decades of separation, mental illness and imprisonment in Bahrain.

As Lilufa struggled to provide information about her family, BRAC staff spoke to her repeatedly before establishing that she was from Singair.

Staff at BRAC's Migration and Reintegration Support Centre in Manikganj then traced her sisters, Mazeda Begum and Shamsunnahar, who broke down in tears upon seeing her after years of separation.

Shariful Hasan, associate director of BRAC's Migration Programme, said he contacted Mahfuzur Rahman, first secretary (labour) at the Bangladesh embassy in Bahrain, after hearing from the sisters.

Embassy officials confirmed that Bahrain police had found Lilufa wandering the streets and imprisoned her for lacking valid documents, he said.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

IN BRIEF

Depoliticise professional bodies: president

UNB, *Dhaka*

President Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday called for keeping professional organisations free from partisan politics, saying politicisation of professional bodies creates unnecessary problems and undermines their professional character.

"Professional organisations should not be politicised," he said, urging all concerned to take initiatives to this end.

The president made the call while inaugurating the 1st International Conference and Dental Expo-2026, organised by the Bangladesh Prosthodontic Society in Dhaka.



He called for an end to the practice of changing the entire structure and affairs of professional organisations whenever the government changes, and collective efforts to bring about positive changes in the country.

He also urged professionals in the health sector to work with greater sincerity and a sense of responsibility, saying people's welfare should remain at the centre of their activities.

Referring to various forms of mismanagement in the health sector and limitations of healthcare services at government hospitals, he said major reforms to the broader healthcare system were needed to ensure medical services reached people at the grassroots. He called upon the relevant authorities to ensure adequate government-appointed doctors at healthcare centres in remote and marginalised areas.

Stressing that the country invests heavily in medical education, he urged young doctors to serve in rural areas, saying a change in mindset was needed among those reluctant to work outside urban centres.

Need more investment in art, culture

Says Khosru; works of 35 artists on display at DD Art Gallery

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bringing together works by 35 distinguished contemporary artists, DD Art Gallery inaugurated a group art exhibition yesterday at its new premises in Dhaka's Gulshan-1.

Hosted by Miss World Bangladesh 2026 Samanzar Sayeed, the programme began at 6:30pm with opening remarks by gallery founder Rizwan Bin Farouq.

Addressing the event as chief guest, Finance and Planning Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury stressed the need to integrate art into Bangladesh's creative economy.

"Without monetising, nothing sustains," he said, emphasising the need to financially support artists, artisans and craftsmen while creating market opportunities and branding platforms for their work.

He also called for expanding cultural spaces, suggesting a dedicated theatre venue in Dhaka.

"Culture and art purify our body and mind. People are slowly growing a habit of appreciating and enjoying art," said renowned artist Monirul Islam.

The exhibition, presented by Dhaka Bank, features artworks by artists Shahabuddin Ahmed, Rafiqun Nabi, Farida Zaman, Rokeya Sultana and Kanak Chanpa Chakma, among others.



Finance and Planning Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, artist Monirul Islam, and visitors explore the artworks on display at a group exhibition inaugurated at DD Art Gallery in Dhaka yesterday. PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

Singer Shaikh Shahed Ali no more

CITY DESK



Singer Shaikh Shahed Ali, best known for the song "Rokzana", died at 10:05am yesterday while undergoing treatment at Asgar Ali Hospital in Dhaka.

Ershadul Haque Tinku confirmed his death to The Daily Star.

Shahed had been battling kidney complications and required regular dialysis. As his condition deteriorated recently, he was admitted to Square Hospital on October 24 and subsequently to Asgar Ali Hospital after his blood sodium levels dropped. During treatment, he suffered a mild stroke and also tested positive for dengue.

After developing severe bleeding, he was placed on life support on Thursday.

His namaz-e-janaza was held after Asr prayers yesterday at Baitun Nur Jame Mosque in Gopibagh of Dhaka.

Later, in keeping with his final wish, the singer was laid to rest beside his mother's grave at the Gopibagh Panchayet Committee graveyard.

His illness had halted plans to release 24 songs developed over 11 years under the

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



A farmer heads to a local market with freshly harvested spinach and red amaranth to sell. With winter setting in, markets are seeing an abundance of leafy greens. The photo was taken in the Baya area of Rajshahi's Paba upazila yesterday. PHOTO: **AZAHAR UDDIN**

PHULBARIA IN MYMENSINGH

A decade on, bridge awaits connecting road

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Mymensingh*

A bridge over the Banar river in Mymensingh's Phulbaria upazila has remained unused for the past 10 years due to the absence of a connecting road at its western end, leaving hundreds of villagers unable to use it.

The 40-foot bridge was built by the Department of Disaster Management in the 2015-2016 fiscal year at a cost of Tk 30.90 lakh to connect the Shibpur-Harirambari road across the river in Naogaon union.

While a narrow earthen road leads to the bridge from the eastern side, croplands lie at its western end in Harirambari village.

Khelu Mia, a local farmer, said villagers had repeatedly urged the local administration and union parishad to build the connecting road, but no action had been taken.

Duli Rani Das of Palashihata village said, "Hundreds of residents of some 10 neighbouring villages would benefit if the bridge becomes functional."

Masud Sarker, a local union parishad member, said cooperation from Harirambari villagers would be needed to build the road, as government land earmarked for it had been occupied for years.



PHOTO: **STAR**

Another union parishad member, Motalab Hossain, said the department concerned had initiated a move to construct the road in 2024, but no funds were subsequently allocated.

Contacted, Shahidul Islam Sohag, Phulbaria upazila nirbahi officer, said he had asked the project implementation officer to submit a report on the current situation.

He said an initiative would be taken soon to construct the road.

RMG workers to get rice at Tk 30 a kg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday launched a special Open Market Sale (OMS) programme, offering rice to ready-made garments workers at Tk 30 per kg to ease their food expenses.

Each worker can buy up to 10kg a month through 66 trucks operating across Dhaka, Savar, Dhamrai, Gazipur, Narayanganj and parts of Chattogram district, according to a Ministry of Food press release.

Each truck will sell five tonnes every Friday, bringing the weekly allocation to 330 tonnes. Sales will continue until further notice, in two sessions -- 10:00am to 12:30pm and 2:30pm to 5:00pm -- subject to stock availability.

Gazipur will get the largest allocation, with 30 trucks selling 150 tonnes, followed by Narayanganj and Chattogram, with 10 trucks each selling 50 tonnes.

Dhaka will have six trucks selling 30 tonnes, Savar eight trucks selling 40 tonnes and Dhamrai two trucks selling 10 tonnes.

Workers must show their factory identity cards and sign a master roll to buy rice.

The programme comes amid unrest in RMG-sector areas over wage demands.

The Minimum Wage Board, formed early this month, has held two meetings. At Monday's meeting, the workers' representative proposed a minimum monthly wage of Tk 32,000.

Netrokona hospital stretched far beyond capacity

Upgraded to 250 beds, but resources remain for just 100

JAYDUL ISLAM, *Netrokona*

The 250-bed Netrokona District Sadar Hospital is struggling to provide healthcare services with just 30 doctors, as severe manpower shortages, inadequate equipment and insufficient allocations of medicines and food put patients under growing pressure.

Although upgraded to 250 beds in October last year, the hospital still operates with the manpower and resources allocated for a 100-bed facility. Its expanded capacity remains largely unused despite the construction of a new nine-storey building at a cost of Tk 47.25 crore.

According to the hospital administration, 38 of the 68 sanctioned doctor posts are vacant. Vacancies also include six of 97 nursing posts, 19 of 42 third-class posts and 10 of 22 fourth-class posts. The blood bank has no assigned staff.



Although upgraded to 250 beds in October last year, Netrokona District Sadar Hospital still operates with the manpower and resources allocated for a 100-bed facility. PHOTO: **STAR**

The shortage is particularly acute in cardiology, ophthalmology, anaesthesiology and dentistry, forcing the hospital to refer patients requiring specialised treatment to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital.

Hospital records show that 2,44,511 patients received treatment at the outpatient and emergency departments between January and October 31 this year, averaging around 804 a day.

During the same period, 46,282 patients were admitted, averaging 152 admissions daily. On November 7, the hospital had 385 inpatients against its 100 operational beds.

However, the hospital still receives around Tk 4 crore worth of medicines and other supplies based on its 100-bed allocation, said Dr Md Mazharul Amin, resident medical officer. Many patients have to buy prescribed medicines from pharmacies outside.

Food allocations also remain limited to 100 patients, although 385 were admitted across 11 wards on November 7. "We cannot provide diets to everyone all the time. In that case, if we give diets to the first 100 patients in the morning, meals are arranged for another 100 in the afternoon -- that is how it is going on," the RMO said.

The hospital has neither an intensive care unit nor a coronary care unit.

Its two ambulances have remained out of order for more than two years. An ambulance brought from Mohanganj Upazila Health Complex is being used, mostly for medical team duties.

Rukan Uddin, a lawyer from Kendua, said he took his 80-year-old father to Mymensingh after two days at the hospital. "There is virtually no treatment at Netrokona hospital," he said.

Hospital Superintendent Ekramul Hasan said patients requiring unavailable facilities were referred to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital.

The hospital authorities have proposed creating 229 additional posts, of which 115 received health ministry approval before the proposal was sent to the finance ministry.

Md Anwarul Haque, a member of the parliamentary standing committee on the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and lawmaker for Netrokona-2, said the hospital's operations could be expanded once the finance ministry approves the manpower proposal.

From hopes of a better life to descent into despair

FROM PAGE 3

The embassy had contacted her brother in Bahrain before arranging her repatriation, but he declined to take responsibility for her, Shariful added.

"We have handed Lilufa over to her family. We want to ensure that she receives proper treatment and explore how we can continue supporting her," he said.

"Her parents are no longer alive, and all her siblings are married. She cannot even communicate normally now. She is suffering both physically and mentally. It is extremely unfortunate," he said.

Shariful said, "People returning from abroad in poor health, distress, or without contact with their families should have access to proper treatment, care, and rehabilitation. The state and all of us have a responsibility to stand beside them."

4-day nat'l debate fest begins at JU

FROM PAGE 3

and 20, respectively. The prize-giving and closing ceremony will take place on November 21.

Al Luban, president of JUDO, said the organisation believes developing young people's reasoning abilities and sense of responsibility is essential to building a humane society. "That belief has inspired JUDO to organise this festival," he added.

The organisers expressed hope that the participation of debaters from across the country would make the festival vibrant and meaningful.

Channel One, Asia Post, and The Daily Star are the media partners of the event, while Prothom Alo is the associate partner, and Uttoron the logistics partner.

Singer Shaikh Shahed Ali

FROM PAGE 3

banner of G Series, which was to include CDs, cassettes and vinyl records.

The release was scheduled for November 6 with a programme at the Krishibid Institution in Dhaka. His plans to travel to India's Delhi this month for a kidney transplant were also put on hold.

A familiar name in Bangladesh's band music scene since the 1990s, Shahed was the founder of Bangladeshi band The Gach. His other notable songs include "Upolobdhi", "Khola Chul", "Classroom-e Bose Shekha", and "Prem Ashbei". His debut album, "Probhu", was released in 1991.

He subsequently released five more albums, building a body of work that reflected his enduring connection with music and songwriting.

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Memo No: 25.20.0000.001.07.001.26-50 Date: 12-11-2026

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12/11/26
(Mashuqul Islam Ragib)
Chairman
Narayanganj Development Authority
Narayanganj

GD-2761

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NOVEMBER 14

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JAMAAT	5-35	1-15	4-00	5-25	7-30

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GD-2760



Medical workers and a rescuer evacuate a resident from an apartment building damaged in a Russian airstrike in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

UP poll ambition

FROM PAGE 16

According to police sources, two helmeted men arrived in Swalpabahirdia village on a motorcycle from the Faqirhat side of Bagerhat around 10:30pm on Thursday.

They stopped beside a shop where Jakir was sitting. One of them entered the shop and shot him in the head before fleeing towards Faqirhat with his accomplice.

Locals rushed Jakir to Rupsha Upazila Health Complex, where he died while undergoing treatment.

The SP said Jakir's body was at Khulna Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

Meanwhile, authorities have decided to launch special joint forces operations to curb terrorism and extortion in Khulna amid a series of killings.

The measures include setting up checkpoints on highways and major roads, deploying 200 Ansar members, increasing patrols and intelligence activities, and intensifying a crackdown on unregistered motorcycles.

The decisions were taken at a special meeting of senior law enforcement officials at Khulna Circuit House on Thursday night. Another meeting on the district's law and order situation was held at the same venue earlier that evening.

Between October 22 and November 12, Khulna witnessed 13 shooting incidents that left six people dead.

Three other murders were reported during the same period, with two victims killed using sharp weapons and another beaten to death.

Of the nine murders, five occurred in Khulna city and four in Rupsha and Dumuria upazilas.

A total of 79 murders were recorded in Khulna between January 1 and November 12 this year, including 39 in the city and 40 in the district.

No respite

FROM PAGE 16

He also called for stronger measures against Culex mosquitoes, whose population is likely to increase in the coming days.

HM Nazmul Ahsan, associate professor at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital, said although dengue cases had declined slightly, hospitals were still receiving a considerable number of critically ill patients.

Ahsan warned that delays in transportation, emergency assessment and hospital admission could cause irreversible organ damage and increase the risk of death among patients with dengue shock.

Early treatment, however, significantly improves their chances of recovery, he said.

He also reported severe complications among dengue patients this year, including liver, kidney, respiratory and heart failure, as well as myocarditis, or inflammation of the heart muscle.

Such complications appeared more common than in previous years, although further studies were needed to determine the reasons, he added.

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

He urged high-risk patients, including those with heart, lung, liver or kidney diseases, asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) or obesity, to seek hospital admission promptly after diagnosis.

"Early hospitalisation is our main recommendation, particularly for high-risk patients. If we can reduce delays in seeking care and ensure appropriate treatment and stabilisation, we may be able to reduce the number of deaths and severe outcomes," Nazmul said.

Eatery vandalised

FROM PAGE 2

the trouble began when a young man occupied a newly vacated seat despite a family waiting for it.

An argument ensued, prompting an employee to intervene. The youth became angry and left, Shafin said.

"A little later, he returned with several others. They first beat up our staff member Khalil outside the restaurant and then began vandalising the premises," he said.

A video circulating on social media shows a group of young men entering the restaurant and throwing chairs, tables and other furniture around.

The restaurant remained closed following the attack.

Ruhul Kabir Khan, deputy commissioner of the Gulshan division, said police had video footage and were working to identify those involved.

Khelafat Majlis

FROM PAGE 2

The issue has yet to be discussed formally within the alliance but could be raised at a meeting later this month.

"If Jamaat is unwilling to contest together, we cannot force them. We may then consider a separate electoral alliance, excluding Jamaat. Besides other parties in the 11-party alliance, there are many Islamic parties outside it, as well as the NCP and other parties. We can explore how to perform well by bringing them together," Jalaluddin said.

Hamidur Rahman Azad, coordinator of the 11-party alliance and assistant secretary general of Jamaat-e-Islami, told The Daily Star that local government elections differed from national polls and did not involve party symbols or national political considerations.

He said a centralised understanding was unnecessary, although local-level discussions could take place after the election schedule was announced and candidates' positions became clear.

Decisions could then be made based on candidates' popularity and prospects of winning, he added.

Azad said separate participation would not affect the alliance, as parties had contested elections independently in the past while maintaining their political cooperation.

Khelafat Ameer Mamunul Haque, however, expressed concern over the issue at a press conference at the party's central office in Purana Paltan, Dhaka, on November 7.

He warned that separate candidates could weaken the 11-party alliance and create divisions at the grassroots.

Mamunul said electoral understanding was essential to preserving unity in the movement and that Jamaat, as the alliance's largest party, should take the lead. He also said Jamaat would have to bear responsibility if no understanding was reached.

At the press conference, he announced his party's mayoral candidates for Dhaka North and South city corporations while keeping the door open for talks with like-minded parties.

Meanwhile, seven Qawmi-based Islamic parties discussed joint participation in local polls at a liaison committee meeting at Al-Jamiatul Islamia Makhzanul Uloom Madrasa in Khilgaon, Dhaka, on October 22.

The parties are Islami Andolan Bangladesh, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Bangladesh, Khelafat Majlis, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, Bangladesh Khelafat Andolon, Islami Oikya Jote and Bangladesh Nezam-e-Islam Party.

They discussed joint activities under the banner of "Like-minded Islamic Parties" and a common position on local polls.

According to meeting sources, Hefazat-e-Islam Bangladesh leaders urged the Qawmi-based parties in the Jamaat-led alliance to leave it. At least three Qawmi-based parties, including Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, are actively involved in the 11-party alliance.

However, no decision has been made on whether parties affiliated with other political alliances must leave those platforms to join the seven-party initiative.

The seven parties are scheduled to meet again on December 5 to discuss the proposed alliance's principles and working procedures.

A reading space lost to years of delay

FROM PAGE 3

replacement remains incomplete, despite work beginning in 2022.

As such, the library, once a vibrant space for readers, has largely been devoid of activity for a prolonged period.

The modernisation project was originally scheduled for completion in December 2024. However, it could not be finished on time, as physical work began only in September 2022.

The project is around 66 percent complete, and now it is expected to be finished by June 2028.

Until then, the library is operating from the 12th floor of the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB) building in Ramna. Limited space has reduced both the number of books available to readers and the number of visitors.

Manish Chakma, director general of the Department of Public Libraries, said around 35 to 40 people now visit the temporary library each day, although the number rises to about 150 during special programmes.

The facility can accommodate around 100 readers and has a separate corner for people with disabilities.

Of the library's roughly 3,50,000 books, only about 70,000 are currently on display. The rest are kept in cartons or stored at the IEB building due to space constraints.

The foundation of the Sufia Kamal National Public Library was laid in 1954 at the present site of Dhaka University Central Library. It was later relocated to its current location in Shahbagh in 1978. The old premises were particularly renowned for hosting cultural programmes.

Sadik Ishmam, a former DU student, said, "Back in the day, we used to attend book fairs and film festivals at the Shawkat Osman Auditorium at the public library. Those events used to be so lively."

The modernisation project was originally scheduled for completion in December 2024. However, it could not be finished on time, as physical work began only in September 2022.

The initial budget for the new library building project was Tk 561 crore 30 lakh. A revised proposal has since been submitted, increasing the budget by Tk 27 crore.

During a recent visit to the old Sufia Kamal National Public Library site in Shahbagh, these correspondents found construction work ongoing, although activity at the site appeared limited.

A few construction workers were seen at the site. When asked, workers said work was progressing, but not at a fast pace, and that the number of workers was limited.

Several shopkeepers in front of the construction site also said they had witnessed almost no progress over a long period. Asked about the progress, Manish said work on the steel structure, lifts, escalators and air-conditioning system was underway.

He said the temporary library at the IEB building had also been proposed under the project's second component, but the proposal had not yet received approval.

Once completed, the new library is expected to accommodate around 1,500 readers at a time, while about 5,000 people will be able to use the premises simultaneously, he said.

Manish also said the planned facility would have separate science, reference and general reading rooms, an e-library, and facilities for children, adolescents and people with disabilities.

It will also include three auditoriums and three seminar halls, exhibition and book-fair spaces, a public plaza, cafeteria, daycare centre, indoor games facilities, a coffee shop, gymnasium, prayer rooms and other facilities, he added.

7 in 10 with diabetes

FROM PAGE 1

of people with diabetes are unaware that they are suffering from the disease.

Among adults with diabetes, 67 percent of women and 72 percent of men were not aware that they had high blood glucose levels, according to the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) 2022, conducted by the National Institute of Population Research and Training (NIPORT) under the health ministry.

The corresponding figures were 59 percent and 61 percent, respectively, in 2017-18, indicating a rise in the proportion of people unaware of their condition.

This lack of awareness persists even as diabetes has spread rapidly across the country over the years, shows both the government and non-government data, increasing the disease burden and putting the healthcare system under strain.

Amid the situation, the country as well as the world is observing the World Diabetes Day today with the theme, "Early action on diabetes," highlighting the importance of earlier diagnosis, access to comprehensive care, and reducing diabetes stigma.

According to WHO, diabetes is a chronic disease that occurs either when the pancreas does not produce enough insulin or when the body cannot effectively use the insulin it produces.

Bangladesh does not have an exact figure of people living with diabetes, but various estimates indicate a huge burden of the disease in the country.

Bangladesh had around 1.39 crore adults aged 20-79 living with diabetes in 2024, according to the International Diabetes Federation (IDF) Diabetes Atlas-2025.

BDHS-2022 found 17 percent of women and 15 percent of men aged 18 and above had diabetes. The survey covered 30,018 households.

The figures were 10 percent and 11 percent respectively, according to the same survey conducted in 2017-18.

The rising figure is also reflected in data from the Diabetic Association of Bangladesh (BADAS).

According to the organisation, the number of registered diabetic patients increased from 30.61 lakh in 2014-15 to 69.37 lakh in 2024-25, a rise of 127 percent over the decade.

The association registered 3.83 lakh new patients in the 2024-25 fiscal year, its data show.

Talking to this correspondent, Prof Sharmin Jahan, chairman of Endocrinology and Metabolism Department of Bangladesh Medical University, said the rising prevalence of diabetes in the country is largely driven by sedentary lifestyles, unhealthy dietary habits, urbanisation, and genetic predisposition.

Diabetes risk is particularly high among South Asians, she said, adding that people with a family history of the disease are at greater risk, especially when they do not maintain a healthy lifestyle.

"Modern lifestyles have become increasingly sedentary. People do very little physical activity but consume high-calorie foods that they don't burn off. This leads to obesity and insulin resistance, increasing the risk of diabetes."

Urbanisation has further aggravated the situation as it reduces opportunities for physical activity through increased motorised transport and increasing dependence on electronic devices and labour-saving technologies, she said.

Unhealthy food habits and inadequate exercise are also contributing to the growing number of people developing diabetes at a younger age, she said, adding that the number of people with prediabetes is also rising.

This lack of awareness persists even as diabetes has spread rapidly over the years, shows both the government and non-government data, increasing the disease burden and putting the healthcare system under strain.

However, diabetes prevalence varies by place of residence, age, and socioeconomic status, shows data.

The prevalence of diabetes among urban women was 24 percent, compared with 14 percent among rural women, according to the BDHS 2022. Among men, the prevalence was 21 percent in urban areas and 13 percent in rural areas.

The wealth gap was also evident. In the highest wealth quintile, diabetes prevalence was 26 percent among women, compared with 11 percent among women in the lowest quintile. Among men, the rate was 25 percent in the highest quintile and 10 percent in the lowest.

Prof Sharmin said people in urban areas are generally more exposed to sedentary lifestyles, calorie-dense diets, electronic devices and stress, while rural residents traditionally engage in more physical labour, walk more, consume locally grown vegetables and maintain more active daily routines.

However, she warned that the gap between rural and urban populations is narrowing as urban lifestyles increasingly spread to villages.

"Rural people are also becoming more dependent on mobile phones, labour-saving technologies and motorised transport, reducing the habit of walking, and contributing to rising diabetes," she said.

While around 70 percent of people with diabetes are unaware of their condition, many who know also do not take medication regularly.

According to the BDHS-2022, only 6 percent of female patients and 5 percent of male patients reported being aware of their condition, taking medication, and having their blood glucose levels under control.

It also found that another 9 percent of both women and men had elevated blood glucose levels but were not taking any medication.

Regarding the lack of awareness, Prof Sharmin said early detection is crucial, as lifestyle changes can prevent or delay the onset of diabetes and its complications.

"If people with a family history of diabetes adopt healthy habits from an early age, including a balanced diet, regular exercise, adequate sleep, and stress management, they can significantly reduce their risk."

Lifestyle modifications alone can prevent around 58-60 percent of diabetes cases among people at risk, the physician said, citing study reports.

"However, many patients don't take diabetes seriously even after diagnosis and often neglect treatment until complications become severe," she said.

Prof Prabath Chandra Biswas, director general of Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), said every upazila health complex has a non-communicable disease (NCD) corner where medicines for diabetes and hypertension are provided, along with routine checkups.

"We are planning to strengthen the NCD corners as the number of diabetic patients is rising."

Asked about reported shortages of diabetes medicines at the NCD corners, he said the authorities had asked hospitals to use their own funds to ensure an uninterrupted supply of medicines at the corners.

Speaking to this correspondent, Health Minister Sardar Md Sakhawat Husain said the government had taken initiatives to expand healthcare services to cope up with the growing number of patients.

The government would take steps to raise public awareness about the disease, he added.

COP31 turns

FROM PAGE 16

European leaders, meanwhile, lined up behind a proposal to expand global electrification, developing countries asked for more finance from rich ones, and fossil fuel producers said oil, gas, and coal should continue to be used.

"We reaffirm our sovereign right to strengthen our energy and oil industry as a driver of our national development," Venezuela's acting President Delcy Rodriguez told the conference, after UN leaders had made the case for bringing to an end the age of fossil fuel.

Apart from trying to accommodate incompatible national positions aired on Wednesday and Thursday, conference host Turkey and negotiations lead Australia also have the challenge of trying to make progress when wars and inflation have pushed climate concerns down the political agenda.

"It's my job to steer consensus, not to bang tables and demand any particular action, but to steer consensus to the strongest, most ambitious possible outcome within the constraints of that consensus-driven process," Chris Bowen, Australia's COP31 president of negotiations, told Reuters.

Asked what a good deal might look like, he said: "I have many more hours of consultations with partners to do."

Climate activists say short-term political concerns should not get in the way of addressing an issue that will get more pressing if ignored. China, however, has decided against hosting the UN's annual climate talks in 2028 after having considered the possibility in recent months, sources familiar with the issue told AFP yesterday.

A UN report last month found the world was already on course to break through the 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) warming limit that countries had agreed to pursue under the 2015 Paris Agreement to prevent the worst effects of climate change.

Developing countries reiterated requests that they have made during many years of UN talks for rich countries to provide more finance to help them shift to cleaner energy, adapt to a warming world, and repair climate-driven destruction.

Fernanda de Carvalho, the head of climate policy for the World Wildlife Fund environmental group, said she found the leaders' speeches underwhelming, especially as COP31 is the first UN conference since scientists have publicly said the world is set to breach the 1.5C threshold.

"It is worrying that the climate issue is not as high on the global political agenda as it needs to be," she said.

Microsoft battles major outage

FROM PAGE 16

support services were impacted.

The outage also disrupted fund management at Taiwanese securities firms, life insurers, and investment trust companies. One of the companies went as far as cancelling a bond repurchase transaction, a source familiar with the situation told Reuters.

Another Taiwanese financial company resorted to using fax to confirm trades, a second source said.

In the US, electric truck maker Workhorse Group rescheduled its results on Thursday to November 16, while Switzerland's Richemont briefly delayed its first half results announcement yesterday.

In Australia, where the spy agency and federal police were among organizations caught in the outage, Cyber Security Minister Tony Burke said Microsoft does not suspect a cyber attack.

"The impact that they are dealing with ... is very much on email systems," the minister added.

Veggie prices rise

FROM PAGE 16

100 in local markets.

Kohinoor Begum, a shopper at Karwan Bazar, expressed frustration over the increases.

"Prices are supposed to drop now, why are they rising?" she asked.

Mohammad Alam, a poultry vendor at Karwan Bazar, said chicken prices had fallen by Tk 10 per kg over the week.

Broiler chicken was selling at Tk 170-175 per kg, hybrid Sonali at Tk 260-280 and regular Sonali at Tk 300-320. Fish prices remained unchanged despite improved supply, said trader Monir Hossain at Karwan Bazar.

Rohu was selling at Tk 300-320 per kg, katla at Tk 280-300 and shrimp at Tk 600-1,000. Farm brown eggs were selling at Tk 120-140 a dozen, beef at Tk 780-850 per kg and mutton at Tk 1,250-1,300 per kg, unchanged from last week.

Give wage board time, return to work

FROM PAGE 16

patient and act professionally in their workplaces.

He also urged the workers not to engage in any activities or instigation that may affect the functions of the wage board.

In the written speech on behalf of the alliances, he urged the government to not harass or arrest any more workers for participating in the demonstrations as well as to release those detained earlier.

Hiking the wages is not the solution as the prices of essential commodities and house rent, which take up the major portion of workers' income, have gone up, he said, while calling upon the government to enforce rent control.

"We want stability and the garment sector to thrive alongside workers' rights," said Ahsan Habib Bulbul, joint coordinator of Sramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad, while calling for resumption of production in factories.

He also demanded a good grievance management in the factories so that the workers need not to go for unrest.

In few areas, the unrest is still going on, said Montu Ghosh, president of Bangladesh Garment Workers Trade Union Centre.

He also urged the workers not to create any scope for factory owners to file cases against them and eventually get arrested by the police.

"Some workers are throwing brick chips towards factories -- we do not want it," he said.

The workers' representative at the wage board has already proposed Tk 32,000 and the discussion on the amount is going on, said Nazma Akter, president of Sommilito Garments Sramik Federation.

The wage board has already held two meetings and the next meeting is scheduled to be held on November 16.

"So, the workers need to be patient and act responsibly now."

Urging the workers to go back to their workplaces, Nazma also said most of the workers are young and if the unrest continues, many of them may lose jobs.

"This is the peak season for delivering work orders from the international clothing retailers and brands, and we have to keep that in mind."

The union leaders are still working out how many workers have been arrested and how many police cases have been filed against workers for the unrest that has gone on for three weeks now, she added.

The minimum salary for the garment workers is reviewed every three years instead of five years previously, said Taslima Akhter, president of the Bangladesh Garment Sramik Samhati.

She also urged the government to release the arrested workers.

"We are hopeful that the wage board will act promptly," she said, while calling for resumption of production in factories as the wage board should be given time for fixing the salary.

Amirul Haque Amin, president of the National Garment Workers Federation, demanded compensation for the worker's death during the unrest.



PHOTOS: COURTESY

Goodbye, Bachelor Point!

Emotional cast reflects on decade-long journey

SHARMIN JOYA

"When I started ***Bachelor Point*** in 2017, I had no grand master plan—I simply needed to survive as a newly married director and cover my basic office rent," said Kajal Arefin Ome, director of what came to be Bangladesh's most popular series.

Following the announcement that the series would conclude with the final episode of its fifth season, the news came as a shock to audiences. The cast, whose characters had become household names, grew emotional after wrapping up their final shoot on November 9. The final episode of the fifth season will air on November 26.

Kabila (Ziaul Hoque Polash), Habu *bhai* (Chashi Alam), Pasha (Marzuk Russell), Nehal (Tawsif Mahbub) and Eva (Parsa Evana) reflected on their journeys with the series. Other memorable core characters include Shuvo (Mishu Sabbir), Arefin (Shamim Hasan Sarkar) and Shimul (Shimul Sharma), all of whom have countless memories associated with the much-loved series.

Ome, the captain of the ship, shared his emotional journey, adding that he now wants to focus on the silver screen and take some time to rest.

"From being just, a series to becoming one of the most important projects of my career, this production gave me a sense of fulfilment as a director, writer and, to some extent, producer as well," Ome shared.

"Operating on what was then Bangladesh's lowest budget for a drama series, we could not even afford a proper shooting house. To save costs under the relentless pressure of shooting two episodes daily, I cast my assistant Palash as Kabila and voiced the off-screen character Rokeya myself over the phone. When our initial producer ran out of funds, Season 1 abruptly came to a halt at episode 53."

Yet, viewers refused to let the show die. In 2018, university students took to the streets and even blocked television network offices, demanding its return. That unprecedented passion paved the way for the show's revival with Season 2, which gained enormous digital popularity during the Covid-19 lockdowns.

Ome also added, "By Season 5, I took full control as the sole producer, writer and director to eliminate creative compromises. We expanded our production scale, shooting across Nepal for the destination season."

Bachelor Point was never just a commercial project; for the entire team, it became an emotion and an identity.

For Palash, wrapping up Season 5 felt like the final day of school—the melancholy of knowing that one might never return to a beloved institution or hear the familiar chatter of its classrooms again. He described his journey as extraordinary.



Eva and Kabila

"Living as Kabila brought reactions from our audience that were beyond expectations. After Season 3 ended, people on the streets would literally bully and curse at me because of their intense emotional investment in the story. Following Season 4, overly passionate fans even vandalised my house. Yet, I accepted all of this positively, knowing it reflected how deeply our characters had penetrated their everyday lives. Recently, at immigration, the officer looked at my passport, saw Ziaul Haque Polash, and jokingly asked why Kabila wasn't written on it instead. People calling me by my character's name is the sweetest fruit of my labour, proving that Kabila has become an unforgettable identity."



Kajal Arefin Ome

Eva, played by Parsa Evana, is another character that audiences made their own.

"***Bachelor Point*** has changed my career in so many ways. It has shaped me not only as an artiste but also changed the way I think, observe and understand my craft."

Although she was not a part of the season, the audience wanted to see her there. In the past week, I've received more than 400 mentions on Instagram. Almost everyone said the same thing: that they expected to see me in the latest season and that Kabila is incomplete without my character. I may not have been part of this season, but I will always be grateful to have been part of this journey. And perhaps this ending isn't really an ending. I believe it's just a new beginning for everyone."

Tawsif Mahbub, who won the hearts of children in particular with his portrayal of Nehal, admitted that he had a meltdown after his final shot.

"Nothing could be nicer than this ending, as Nehal returned to make the audience emotional, and the season is ending on such a great note. Before delivering my very last close-up shot, I asked Ome *bhai* for his blessings, which left both of us teary-eyed and the set in complete silence. I struggled to remember my final dialogue with a heavy heart, but somehow, we finished the take," he recalled.

Ome *bhai* immediately walked over from behind the monitor to embrace him, as the entire crew shared an emotional farewell.

Tawsif also recalled heartwarming encounters with young fans during the filming of ***Bachelor Point***. "They were all between five and eight years old, excited to see Nehal. Most of them didn't even know my real name!" he said.

Another encounter left a lasting impression on Tawsif when a teenager told him that Nehal had inspired him to pursue higher education in Bangladesh rather than go abroad after his O-Levels.

"It made me realise that those who say there is nothing good in this series should look again. If you want to find something good, you can. I was happy that these children found positive messages and took good lessons from it," he said.

Among the cast, Marzuk Russell, who plays Pasha, was particularly emotional, surprising his fellow artistes, who said they had rarely seen him break down this way.

Reflecting on his journey with the series, he said, "I didn't take on any other project while working on this series, and it gave me immense experience. I am grateful to Ome for maintaining discipline and punctuality, teaching us acting techniques and creating a homely environment where we could be ourselves. We didn't simply work commercially and return home; we became one big family, and we will remain one. I don't consider this an ending, but a break. This series shall return."

TRENDY STREAMS

Netflix
Bass X Machina



Prime Video
The Rings of Power



Apple TV+
Nocturne



Hoichoi
Kauriburir Mandir



Chorki
Feu



OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA

'Flavourful Bangladesh'
November 11-20 | 6:00pm onwards
Cafe Social, InterContinental Dhaka

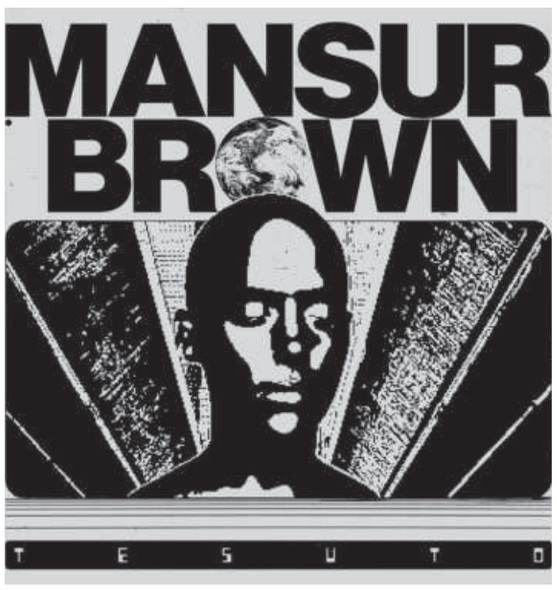


'Exposure'
November 13 – 15 | 3:30pm–8:00pm
Safiuddin Shilpalay, Dhanmondi



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





WHAT'S PLAYING

'It's My Time'

by Mansur Brown

Mansur Brown's instrumental track ***It's My Time*** turns struggle and perseverance into sound. Released in 2020 on his three-track ***Tesuto*** EP, the instrumental moves from restraint to release, turning a winding guitar line into a quiet declaration of steady resolve.

The track begins with space to breathe. Brown lets each phrase hang before drums and electronic textures gradually thicken the arrangement. By the time the guitar pushes forward, the music feels less like a performance than an internal struggle finally breaking into the open.

Brown has described the piece as a story of triumph, about processing pain before finding the strength to face it. That idea explains its renewed appeal on social media, where its patient build lends itself naturally to moments of transformation, confidence and unexpected arrival.

TV TALKIES

'Jailer 2'

Jailer 2 brings back retired jailer Tiger Muthuvel Pandian, played by Rajinikanth, as he finds himself caught up in another dangerous mission. Having left his days as a jailer behind, Tiger is once again drawn into a world of crime, violence and powerful enemies. As the stakes rise, he must rely on his experience and familiar allies to take on those standing in his way. Directed by Nelson Dilipkumar, the action thriller also stars Ramya Krishnan, Yogi Babu, S J Suryah, Vidya Balan and Mithun Chakraborty, with special appearances by Mohanlal, Jackie Shroff and Shiva Rajkumar. The film is now streaming on Amazon Prime Video.



STYLE STATEMENT

Kiara Advani

Bollywood actress Kiara Advani exuded elegance and sophistication in a pristine white ensemble. The corset-inspired silhouette, effortless styling and softly cascading waves came together to create a look that was both timeless and contemporary.

Balancing minimalism with understated glamour, the ensemble beautifully complemented her natural charm, making it a fashion moment that was hard to miss.

Fight over climate science intensifies at COP31

AFP, *Antalya*

The European Union yesterday vowed to "fight" for science at the UN climate summit after accusing some countries of seeking to undermine the world's leading authority on global warming.

A long-running disagreement over when to publish the next major reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is spilling into the COP31 talks in Turkey, threatening to complicate negotiations toward a final deal.

The EU and dozens of other nations want the next set of IPCC reports available before a crucial stocktake of global efforts to cut planet-heating emissions at the 2028 edition of the annual climate summit.

Saudi Arabia, China and India are among those pushing for the IPCC's "seventh assessment report" to be delayed until 2029.

The IPCC is deadlocked over the timetable, but some countries want the matter put on the table in Turkey, where negotiations are approaching the midway point.

"We will fight for this outcome to be there," senior EU climate official Diana Acconcia told reporters, cautioning it would "not be so easy" to bridge the gulf on the issue.

"There are some parties that are trying to undermine what science is telling us because they don't want to do what it takes to address climate change," Acconcia said.

"It is as simple as that," she added, lamenting the "polarised" nature of the debate.

The IPCC publishes a series of reports every seven years that provide the definitive scientific assessment of climate change and inform global policy responses to the crisis.

Pierre Friedlingstein, a climate scientist from the University of Exeter and author of previous IPCC assessments, said it was "always best for policy decisions to be based on the most up-to-date science".



Investigators work at the site of a car explosion that wounded Sergei Zavorotniy, former spokesman for ex-Ukrainian prime minister Mykola Azarov (2010-2014), in Moscow, Russia, yesterday.
PHOTO: **REUTERS**

Yemen govt forces fortify Aden defences

Iran-backed Houthi foes seize hilltops overlooking the area, say military officials

AFP, *Abu Dhabi*

Yemen's internationally recognised government is fortifying positions on the outskirts of Aden province, home to their de facto capital, as their Iran-backed Houthi foes seize hilltops overlooking the area, three military officials told AFP.

Fighting has flared since a 2022 truce fell apart over the summer, with violence intensifying after Yemen's Saudi-backed government lost control of the Red Sea coastline along the strategic Bab al-Mandab strait in September.

Houthi fighters are now advancing east, consolidating their gains near the Red Sea while also moving closer to the Gulf of Aden. They have been taking hold of strategic hilltops in the Al-Madaribah wal Ara district overlooking Aden province, the sources said.

"We received high-level directives to establish military fortifications west and north of Aden Governorate, as the threat to the government's interim capital draws nearer," one of the military officials said.

The fortifications include stacking up sandbags and digging tunnels. All the sources requested anonymity to discuss sensitive matters.

Government forces have repeatedly tried to regain control of the Red Sea coast to no avail, with battles killing dozens on both sides in the past couple of days, according to government and Houthi sources.

Another of the military officials described the fortification outside Aden as a long-overdue precautionary measure.

The third military source, a field officer on the ground, said the Houthis were advancing east of the strait towards the Gulf of Aden coast after taking large parts of Al-Madaribah wal Ara district adjacent to Aden province.

Nearby also lies the mountainous region of Al-Maqatirah , home to a road serving as the main gateway to the city of Taiz, which has been besieged by the Houthis for weeks.

The source said Al-Maqatirah had been captured by the Houthis, complicating government efforts to retake Taiz and opening the door to further advances in Al-Madaribah.

Aden has come under regular Houthi attack since hostilities resumed, with the group targeting the presidential palace complex and a base at the airport.



Yemen has been embroiled in war since 2014, when the Houthis seized the capital Sanaa, forcing the government to relocate to Aden and declare the city its temporary capital.

The conflict fell dormant between 2022 and July this year, when a fragile truce collapsed amid the US-Iran war.

The Houthis allowed an Iranian plane to land in Sanaa in defiance of Saudi control over Yemeni airspace, setting off a spate of attacks.

Later, the Houthis declared a maritime blockade of Saudi Arabia and began hitting its airports, ships and oil facilities, before seizing Yemen's entire Red Sea coast.

IN BRIEF



Hollen announces bid for US Senate majority leader

Challenges Schumer for the post

REUTERS, *Washington*

Democratic US Senator Chris Van Hollen said on Thursday he would run for Senate majority leader, challenging Chuck Schumer, who has led the Democrats in the Senate since 2017, after the Democratic Party won a majority in the chamber in the midterm elections.

Schumer, who is expected to retain his party's leadership in the chamber but previously predicted not having a challenger, released his own statement on Thursday saying he had the votes to continue as the Democratic leader in the Senate.

The closed-door secret-ballot vote will take place next month.

Van Hollen, a Maryland Democrat, said that in the midterm elections, in which Democrats also secured a majority in the House of Representatives, voters called for "a change from the status quo that isn't working for working people."

North Korean hackers stole $400m using fake calls: FBI

AFP, *Washington*

North Korea's state-backed hackers stole more than $400 million using a "highly effective social engineering scheme" involving identity theft and AI-powered fake video calls, the FBI said on Thursday.

The FBI this month accused hackers affiliated with North Korea of the theft of $6 billion from cryptocurrency platform Binance, a charge Pyongyang denies.

The FBI this month accused hackers affiliated with North Korea of the theft of $6bn from cryptocurrency platform Binance

"The North Korean regime relies on proceeds from large-scale cryptocurrency theft to fund its illicit weapons program, stealing billions of dollars in recent years," said FBI Cyber Branch Operations Director Brett Leatherman.

The FBI said that, separate from the Binance hack, North Koreans have "aggressively (targeted) individuals in the cryptocurrency and Web3 sectors through deceptive social engineering tactics."

The scheme has led to the theft of more than $400 million in the last 18 months.



Truck, bus collision in Assam kills 23

AFP, *New Delhi*

A head-on collision between a container truck and a passenger bus killed at least 23 people, including three children, in eastern India yesterday, a police official told AFP.

The crash took place on a highway bordering Kaziranga National Park in the northeastern state of Assam. The road is a designated animal corridor, where strict speed limits are in place. "The total number of casualties is 23," said Swapneel Deka, the local district police chief.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said he was "deeply distressed by the tragic accident".

"The scale of this loss has shaken all of us, and my heart goes out to every family that has lost a loved one," Sarma said on X.

India, with a population of 1.4 billion, recorded more than 183,000 road traffic deaths in 2025, or over 500 a day, according to the roads ministry.

Many accidents are linked to inadequate road infrastructure, poorly maintained vehicles and exhausted drivers, according to official data.



People attend a funeral ceremony for the remains of 110 soldiers recently recovered from the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war, in Tehran, Iran, yesterday.
PHOTO: REUTERS

Netanyahu uses fear of Iran to stay in power

AGENCIES

As the right-wing coalition government that oversaw the genocide in Gaza, launched attacks across the region, and eroded civil liberties at home appears to lose its grip on power by the day, caretaker Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's increasingly frantic efforts to derail the political transition suggest a growing desperation to stay in office.

Among those efforts appears to be an attempt to reignite the war with Iran. Netanyahu has reportedly ordered the Israeli military to prepare for war ahead of a potential attack on Iran, in defiance of the opposition's calls for restraint.

The reports follow revelations that Netanyahu had been phoning US President Donald Trump almost daily to press for renewed strikes on Iran. Israeli media have also reported repeated confrontations between Netanyahu and military chief Eyal Zamir, who has resisted proposals for military action against Iran, warning that they could trigger a wider conflict.

Opposition leader Gadi Eisenkot has been tasked with forming a viable government, but that is not a foregone conclusion. Netanyahu has been pushing for a national unity government that would include himself and his Likud party, or waiting for Eisenkot to fail, leading to another election, reports Al Jazeera.



Analysts say Israeli politicians would back Netanyahu despite knowing the war serves his political survival

"Netanyahu is desperate," Ahron Bregman, an Israeli political analyst at King's College London, said. "He knows – and you can see it from his behaviour – that it is likely that he is politically done, and only a national unity government could save him."

"A little war could compel Eisenkot & Co," he said, referring to the opposition bloc and its leader, Gadi Eisenkot, "to form such a government in a time of crisis."

WHY DIABETES RISK BEGINS BEFORE THE SCALES SHOW IT

TAHSIN-UL-ISLAM SAMIN

A person does not have to be visibly overweight to be at risk of type 2 diabetes. Among South Asians, the condition can develop at younger ages and lower body weights, prompting researchers to look beyond BMI for answers.

A 2025 study published in Nature Medicine has offered new insight into why type 2 diabetes can develop earlier among people of South Asian ancestry. Examining genetic and health data from 50,556 British Pakistani and Bangladeshi participants, researchers identified two important pathways associated with the condition: reduced insulin production and unfavourable fat distribution.

The study found that participants with a high genetic risk across both pathways were diagnosed with type 2 diabetes an average of 8.2 years earlier and at a body mass index (BMI) around 3 kg/m² lower than those with low genetic risk across both. The findings suggest that susceptibility is influenced by more than body weight alone.

Like many, Belayet, a 24-year-old university student in Dhaka, did not think he had much reason to worry about diabetes. He was going about his usual routine when he decided to get a health check-up. He had not noticed any major symptoms, and his weight did not suggest an obvious health concern. But his blood tests revealed elevated blood glucose and further testing confirmed type 2 diabetes.

The diagnosis meant rethinking his daily habits, from what he ate to how regularly he exercised and monitored his health. It also challenged the assumption that diabetes is primarily a concern for people who are visibly overweight.

His experience highlights why diabetes risk among South Asians cannot always be judged by appearance or body weight alone.

A GROWING BURDEN

The issue has significant implications for Bangladesh. According to the International Diabetes Federation's 2025 Diabetes Atlas, an estimated 13.9 million adults aged 20–79 were living with diabetes in the country in 2024. The age-standardised prevalence was 13.2%, while an estimated 39.1% of people with diabetes remained undiagnosed. The number is projected to reach 23.1 million by 2050.

The large undiagnosed population makes early detection particularly important.

However, identifying people at risk can be challenging when conventional indicators, such as body weight, do not tell the whole story.

Professor Dr F M Siddiqui, Vice-Chancellor of Bangladesh Medical University (BMU), says diabetes can develop for years without noticeable symptoms.

"Initially, the disease presents no symptoms and can develop inside the body for many years without the patient being aware of it," he says.

He emphasises that early detection allows people to take preventive measures before complications develop. "If we identify the disease early, we can initiate several interventions, and medication may not even be necessary in some cases. Before medication, we have to have a lifestyle modification."

LOWER BMI DOES NOT MEAN LOWER RISK

BMI measures weight in relation to height, but it cannot distinguish between fat and muscle or indicate where fat is stored. Research suggests that South Asians may have a higher proportion of body fat and less lean mass than people of European ancestry at a similar BMI.

Prof Dr M Saifuddin, Professor of Endocrinology at Dhaka Medical College and General Secretary of the Bangladesh Endocrine Society, says South Asians tend to accumulate more abdominal and visceral fat, even at relatively lower body weights.

"They also generally have lower muscle mass, greater insulin resistance and increased genetic susceptibility," he says.

"Consequently, Bangladeshis may develop type 2 diabetes at a BMI considered normal in other populations. This means body weight alone cannot accurately reflect diabetes risk."

A 2024 study published in Nature Metabolism, known as the GlasVEGAS study, examined how weight gain affected the metabolic health of South Asian and white European men. Researchers followed 14 South Asian and 21 white European men through a four-to-six-week period of overfeeding.

Although both groups gained a similar amount of weight, South Asian participants experienced a 38% reduction in insulin sensitivity, compared with 7% among white European participants. They also gained less lean tissue.

The study provides experimental evidence that modest weight gain can have different metabolic effects across populations. However, its small sample and male-only participants mean the findings should not be treated as representative of all South Asians.

Waist circumference can provide additional information about abdominal fat and metabolic risk. According to a 2023 regional consensus, Bangladesh's recommended action points are a BMI of 23 kg/m² for overweight and 25 kg/m² for obesity. Waist circumferences of 90 centimetres for men and 80 centimetres for women are indicators of central obesity. These are risk-assessment thresholds, not diagnostic criteria for diabetes.

Prof Saifuddin explains that excess abdominal fat can interfere with the body's ability to use insulin.

"Excess abdominal fat releases inflammatory substances and fatty acids that interfere with normal insulin action. As a result, body cells become less responsive to insulin, causing blood glucose levels to rise," he says.

READ MORE ON PAGE 9



ILLUSTRATION: FERDOUS MOMO



Diabetes management requires a comprehensive approach to protect vital organs and prevent long-term complications. Maintaining blood glucose, blood pressure and cholesterol within recommended ranges is essential to reducing the risk of heart disease, stroke, kidney damage and vision loss.

A balanced, fiber-rich diet containing vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins and healthy fats, combined with regular physical activity can improve insulin sensitivity and support healthy body weight. Even losing 5–10% of excess body weight can significantly improve metabolic health.

Medication adherence is equally important. Patients should never skip doses or discontinue prescribed medication without consulting their doctors. Regular monitoring of blood glucose and HbA1c levels, kidney function and cholesterol, along with annual comprehensive eye and foot examinations, helps detect complications at an early stage.

Avoiding smoking and seeking professional medical advice instead of relying on unverified health information are also essential. Ultimately, effective diabetes management goes beyond controlling blood sugar. Consistent lifestyle modifications, appropriate medication, regular health screenings and timely medical intervention are crucial to protecting vital organs and maintaining long-term health.

Professor Dr. Farhana Akter
Professor & Head, Department of Endocrinology
Chattogram Medical College & Hospital



Diabetes is not merely a physical condition; it also carries a significant psychological burden. The relationship between diabetes and mental health is bidirectional: the constant demands of managing the disease can cause emotional distress while anxiety and depression can make blood sugar control more difficult. Daily responsibilities, such as monitoring glucose levels, taking medication, regulating food intake and attending medical appointments can contribute to diabetes distress, anxiety and clinical depression.

According to global estimates, around 77% of people with diabetes experience mental health challenges. People living with diabetes are also twice as likely to develop depression compared to those without the condition. Diabetes distress is particularly prevalent, affecting more than 60% of people with type 2 diabetes and over 70% of those with type 1 diabetes.

The psychological impact can vary across age groups and genders. Adolescents often face additional emotional challenges as they navigate the demands of disease management alongside social and developmental pressures. Women may also experience higher rates of anxiety and depression following diagnosis than men. These challenges highlight why diabetes care must extend beyond blood sugar management to include emotional well-being, psychological support and timely mental health interventions.

Professor Dr. Samir Kumer Talukder
Professor, Endocrinology Department
Rangpur Medical College & Hospital, Rangpur



Diabetes treatment has evolved significantly over the past decade, shifting from simply controlling blood glucose to protecting overall health and preventing complications. Treatment is now more personalised, with doctors considering patients' age, weight, kidney function, heart health and lifestyle.

Newer medicines, including GLP-1 receptor agonists and dual GIP/GLP-1 receptor agonists, have transformed type 2 diabetes management by improving glucose control, reducing appetite and supporting weight loss. Some also offer cardiovascular and kidney benefits. Meanwhile, continuous glucose monitoring (CGM), insulin pumps and smart applications enable more precise monitoring and personalised care, although affordability remains a challenge.

Despite these global advances, Bangladesh faces barriers including high treatment costs, limited awareness, late diagnosis and inadequate access to trained professionals and modern technologies. The International Diabetes Federation estimated that 13.9 million Bangladeshi adults had diabetes in 2024, with approximately 39% undiagnosed.

Our priority must be early detection, affordable essential medicines, better primary healthcare and wider access to evidence-based modern treatments.

Professor Dr. Feroz Amin
Professor
Endocrinology Department
BIRDEM General Hospital
Course Director , BIRDEM Academy



Managing diabetes requires more than medication; food habits and lifestyle changes play an equally important role. A balanced diet, regular physical activity, maintaining a healthy weight, adequate sleep and stress management can help control blood glucose levels and in some cases reduce the need for medication under medical supervision.

People with diabetes do not need to give up rice, sweets or their favourite foods completely. Instead, they should practise moderation and portion control. Since rice is a staple in Bangladesh, patients can reduce white rice portions rather than eliminate it, include more seasonal vegetables such as cabbage, beans and spinach and add protein-rich foods such as fish, eggs, chicken and lentils. Whole grains and brown rice can also be considered when affordable and practical.

Sleep deprivation, stress and irregular meal timings can negatively affect blood glucose control by influencing hormones and increasing insulin resistance. Patients should prioritise six to eight hours of sleep, regular exercise, balanced meals, hydration and stress-management practices.

Sustainable lifestyle changes are more effective than temporary restrictive diets. Gradual adjustments, realistic goals and family support can help people maintain healthy habits.

Dr. Faria Afsana
Associate Professor and Head, Department of Endocrinology, BIRDEM, Dhaka
President, Bangladesh Endocrine Society

world diabetes day
14 November
Diabetes and well-being
Act early on Diabetes
Scan & Know Your Risk
Courtesy:
Emazid L™ 10/5 25/5
Empagliflozin and Linagliptin
Ligazid M®
Linagliptin + Metformin
Zepter™ 2.5mg 5mg 7.5mg
Tirzepatide
*Prescription only medicine
SK+F | ESKAYEF PHARMACEUTICALS LTD.

WHY DIABETES RISK BEGINS BEFORE THE SCALES SHOW IT

FROM PAGE 8

He adds that some people with normal body weight may still have excessive visceral fat surrounding their internal organs. "Being slim does not necessarily mean being metabolically healthy."

WHAT GENETIC RESEARCH REVEALS

The 2025 Nature Medicine study adds to growing evidence that genetic factors influence diabetes susceptibility among South Asians. Its findings point to pathways involving pancreatic beta-cell function, which affects insulin production, and the distribution of body fat.

A 2022 study published in Communications Biology also identified 21 previously unreported genetic loci associated with type 2 diabetes through a genome-wide analysis involving 16,677 South Asian participants with the condition and 33,856 controls.

However, genetic susceptibility does not mean that developing diabetes is inevitable. Environmental conditions, diet, physical activity and other factors remain important.

Prof Saifuddin says family history and waist circumference should be considered alongside body weight when assessing risk.

"Diabetes risk should therefore not be assessed solely through appearance or body weight. Waist circumference, blood glucose, blood pressure and family history should also be considered," he says.

WHY EARLY SCREENING MATTERS

Researchers have also examined whether nutrition during pregnancy and early childhood can affect metabolic health later in life.

A 2016 study published in BMJ Open investigated young adults in Matlab, Bangladesh, who had been exposed to the 1974 famine at different stages of early life. Although researchers found differences in body weight and some epigenetic markers, there were no statistically significant overall differences in mean blood glucose or diabetes rates. The study therefore did not establish that famine exposure caused diabetes.

For people who may be at risk, screening can help identify problems before symptoms appear. Prof Siddiqui recommends blood sugar testing for people above 30, particularly those with hypertension, excess weight, high cholesterol, a smoking habit or a family history of diabetes.

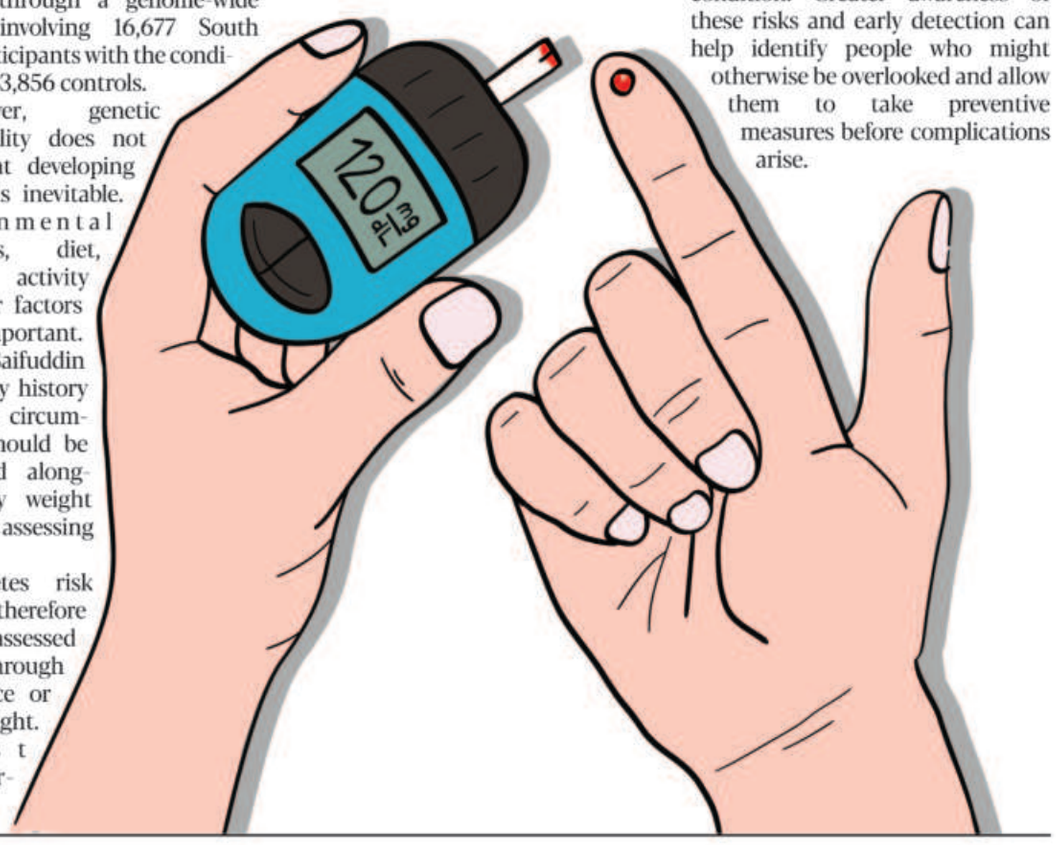
He also highlights the importance of lifestyle changes for people with prediabetes.

"Research has shown that reducing carbohydrate intake, walking for at least 150 minutes a week and losing around seven kilogrammes of weight can the risk of reducedeveloping diabetes by 60%," he says.

Diabetes can be diagnosed through tests such as fasting plasma glucose, HbA1c and the oral glucose tolerance test. Diagnostic thresholds include fasting plasma glucose of 7.0 mmol/L or higher, HbA1c of 6.5% or higher, or a two-hour glucose level of 11.1 mmol/L or higher during an oral glucose tolerance test. In people without clear symptoms, an abnormal result generally needs confirmation.

Family history, waist circumference and other risk factors need to be considered when assessing diabetes risk, particularly among South Asians who may develop the condition at lower body weights. BMI and physical appearance alone may not provide a complete picture, making regular screening and timely testing important.

Although genetic factors can increase a person's susceptibility to diabetes, they do not determine whether someone will develop the condition. Greater awareness of these risks and early detection can help identify people who might otherwise be overlooked and allow them to take preventive measures before complications arise.



Healthy Life Starts with Your Trust...
Aalok
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Diagnostic Services
24/7
Hospital Services
24/7
AALOK HOSPITAL LTD.
Mother & Child Care
100+ Bed Hospital Facilities
Serving Healthcare for 30+Years
Mirpur-10 Dhaka
Affordable Healthcare for the Poor
Aalok Healthcare & Hospital
Aalok Health TV
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ESSAY

AHMED SOFA AND ALBERT CAMUS: Two intellectuals against the plague of society

MD SHIHAB UDDIN

On the surface, the life and literary work of the iconoclastic intellectual from Bangladesh, Ahmed Sofa, and the timeless novel *The Plague* (1947) by French existentialist philosopher Albert Camus seem to be born of two widely divergent geographical and political environments. One was written in the setting of the post-World War II European disillusionment, fascism and existential fears, and the other, a post-colonial Bangladesh, Liberation War and political and social decay. But, a close examination of the theoretical undergrowth and implicit philosophies of their work shows a remarkable spiritual and philosophical unity between the thinkers of these two worlds. Their thought is humanistic existentialist, an uncompromising combat against the 'plague' of social degradation, and the dispassionate moral obligation of the intellectual.



ILLUSTRATION: MAHMUDA EMDAD

Camus's philosophy was rooted in the idea of the Absurd, or the meaninglessness inherent in life. Plague is a sudden outbreak of an epidemic in the Algerian city of Oran that is not just a disease but a deep metaphor for an irrational devastation thrown at the life of humankind. This plague represents fascism which is laying siege to human freedom. This "absurdity" is very much there in the life and literature of Ahmed Sofa, but not in the European sense, rather as a third-world political absurdity. *Alatachakra* (1985) or *Gabhi Bittanto* (1995) show us a society which is struck by a moral and intellectual epidemic in Sofa's novels. If the spirit of the Liberation War is plundered in the case of independent Bangladesh and if intellectuals turn into scavengers of power, that reality of the society turns as besieged and senseless as Camus's Oran. Like Camus, who celebrated man's futile but heroic struggle against The Plague, Sofa's essay "Buddhibrittir Natun Binnash" was his personal and philosophical stand against the rot of institutions and The Plague.

In Camus' novel, *The Plague* is a sinister entity that infects all, and for which there is no way out. The people of Oran first try to ignore the epidemic, then panic, and finally rebel against it. Sofa's "plague" is the mental subservientness, the lack of backbone and political opportunism of Bengali society as seen in the literature. Sofa's characterisation of high-level corruption and sycophancy in the university in *Gabhi Bittanto* is a mirror image of a horrendous social scourge. The dirty political politics of everyone from the vice-chancellor to the teachers, played around an ox, are just as harmful as Camus' metaphorical epidemic. In Sofa's novel, The Plague wipes out the intellect and conscience of a nation while in Camus' book, plague kills the human body. Both authors have shown that a plague shatters masks, revealing the deepest selfishness of humanity and its ability to make the greatest of sacrifices and show the greatest empathy.

The Plague's main character, Dr. Bernard Rieux, is not a typical hero. He has no faith in God, and he doesn't utter political dogma. He's just doing what doctors do. In one of the famous dialogues in the novel Dr. Rieux remarks that The Plague offers no heroism, it is a matter of common decency. To him decency is nothing more than doing his job. The closest portrait of Dr. Rieux can be seen in Ahmed Sofa's life and view of the writer. All of the time, Sofa was far away from the halls of power. To him, the job of an intellectual was the same as Dr. Rieux's: When a society has a disease, tell the truth and cure them. Like Dr. Rieux's refusal of performative heroism, sofa's absolute disdain for state awards, institutional recognition or media fanfare. During the great Liberation War of 1971, he used his pen, he came out to the streets to fight against autocracy in this newly formed country and he inspired young writers, all in the name of conscience, in the name of his 'decency'. Like Dr. Rieux, Sofa never gave up in the struggle against The Plague of political and cultural epidemics in Bangladesh.

The worst afflictions of the citizens of Oran in the time of plague was the agony of exile: a besieged city, isolated from their dear ones. Ahmed Sofa's life was also a story of great isolation intellectually. He was an optimist and lived out his life honestly and without compromise, and this brought him into conflict with the opportunist society of his day. The culmination of this loneliness is in his *Pushpa Brikkha Ebong Bihanga Puran* (1996). Like Camus' second characters, who find temporary solace by swimming in the sea to escape the terror of The Plague, Sofa, disillusioned with humanity, finds a refuge in flowers, vines and birds. His keen interest in plants and animal life on his roof wasn't just a nature-loving pastime, it was a way to make sense of the world in an absurd, meaningless earth. Humanity is destroyed in the process and although society crumbles, nature is the last place one can turn. Sofa's botanical and avian mythos is a quiet celebration of the very same philosophy as Camus' philosophy, the joy of living amongst the void.

The famous words of Camus were "I rebel; therefore we exist." The Plague is about how Dr. Rieux, Tarrou and Rambert transcend individual isolation to create a community, the sanitary squads. They know The Plague may never end; giving up without a fight is not human nature. In the life and in the works of Ahmed Sofa is this very story of a collective resistance. He did not write just for himself. The reverence he displays towards Abdur Razzaq in Jadyapi *Amar Guru* (1998) is an intellectual journey in search of a nation. Sofa felt that such a social evil or corruption could only be fought with a mass mental reawakening. He was the core of that opposition. Every time the country was in trouble—in military autocracy, or communal riots, or cultural imperialism, Sofa was in the front with his own 'sanitary squad': his pen and his young disciples. Sofa, like Camus's characters in *The Plague*, struggled to preserve the dignity of the human person through his writings, and the dignity of the Bengali people through the struggle.

Stylistically the two are quite similar. The novel that Camus wrote is like a diary or a journalistic report; it's dispassionate, like nothing is happening, yet it's very passionate, burning under the surface. He didn't embellish the terror of the epidemic with frills. The prose of Ahmed Sofa is also plain, pointed and taut. His essays lack any pretence, his novels any mawkish sentiment. In *Alatachakra*, the raw depiction of the refugee camps is without imagination, and without the bias of any dissection but that of the hard reality. As Camus, Sofa felt it was necessary to present the truth in its most bare and natural state.

On the last page of *The Plague*, Dr. Rieux reminds us that plague bacillus never really dies: it lurks for years in furniture and linens, awaiting the day it might once more rouse the rats of a happy city to bring a message of death. Similarly, through his literature Ahmed Sofa warned us. He continually pointed out the germs of fascism, bigotry, and sycophancy lurking in the crevices of our society. Whatever their differences in structure, both Camus and Sofa were indomitable architects of human existence, who, in the face of epic plagues, taught us to fight with common decency.

Md. Shihab Uddin *is an independent researcher and an undergraduate student of Folklore and Social Development Studies at the University of Rajshahi. He may be contacted at shihab.fsds@gmail.com.*

POETRY

Beyond the pond

SHIBLEE SHAHED

I sat by the pond after a long hiatus.
Just then, a butterfly drifted away,
slightly touching the water's surface.
Like my transient youth,
a woodpecker took wing,
for it had to peck at wood
and drink its share of musky water.
A few ducks circled round and round,
in an attempt to create something
more sublime than the dictates of the food chain.
I turned to the child beside me.
"Look, there's no world beyond the pond."
The child laughed.
In its laughter live on
my ancestry,
my lineage.

Dr Shiblee Shahed *is a public health specialist, essayist, poet, and translator. His debut poetry collection was published in 2013 by Shuddhashar Publications. His poems and articles have appeared in numerous national and international outlets. He is a regular contributor to* The Daily Star.

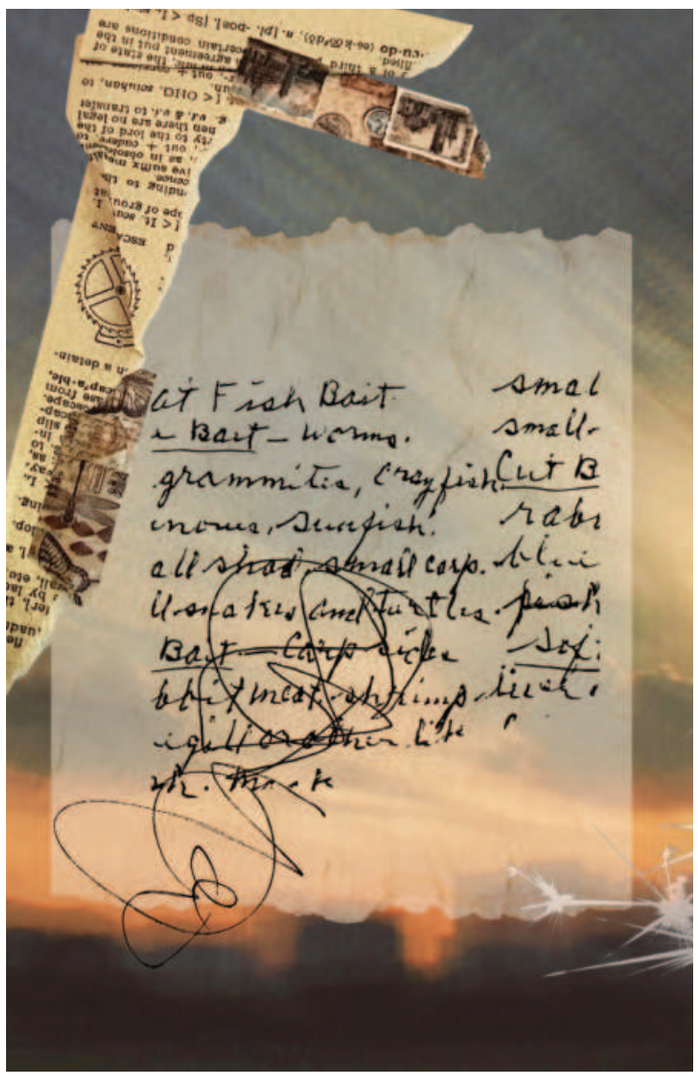


ILLUSTRATION: MAHMUDA EMDAD

POETRY

Rage

JARIN SUBAH

And one day—
When i pick my pen again,
All i have is rage
Scratched on pages
Lines cut like bleeding wounds being cut twice
The sort of rage where my eyes burn
into a silent pain,
gradually radiating to my lower jaw
I clench so deep that I fail to realise
there's a circular trace of teeth on my hand
Clear and red yet comforting in a way
my heart starts pounding to the physical pain
And my lungs?
Flaring for air; yet prefers to live without it
I could think of a thousand different ways to hurt myself
Just a visual representation of how love screwed up my mind
I have rage to the point
I could burn pages but not lives
I could complain to god but never let my prayers be the cause of your demise
I could wish for you to live with the burden of regrets; alive but dead inside
And when memories rewind,
I fuel my rage with the poems I write

Jarin Subah *is a third year medical student using poetry as escapism.*



ILLUSTRATION: MAISHA SYEDA

POETRY

Three haiku

QUAMRUL HASSAN

first kiss
she covers his eyes
with her palm
first rain
she makes the divorce letter
a paper boat
full moon
grandma sings
grandpa's favorite song
summer date
all over her dress
sunflowers
her little request—
a sip from mom's
cup of tea

Quamrul Hassan *is an MFA Candidate at the University of Arkansas's Program in Creative Writing and Translation. He is the author of haiku collections* Spring Moon *and* Hyaku Haiku, *while the third book* Autumn Rain *is set to be published next year.*

NEVIAN | The Daily Star

ADVANCING DIABETES PREVENTION and Care in Bangladesh

A roundtable titled "World Diabetes Day 2026: Acting Early to Prevent Diabetes and Improve Care in Bangladesh" was held on 28 October 2026 to mark World Diabetes Day. Jointly organised by Nevian Lifesciences and The Daily Star, the discussion brought together leading diabetologists, endocrinologists and relevant healthcare experts to examine the growing diabetes burden in Bangladesh. The dialogue focused on early detection, preventive measures, public awareness, accessible screening, affordable treatment, and improved long-term patient care, highlighting the need for coordinated action to strengthen diabetes prevention and management nationwide.



DR AK AZAD KHAN
National Professor
BIRDEM General Hospital

Diabetes is a growing global public health challenge, but prevention and effective management can significantly reduce its impact. Early diagnosis, lifestyle changes and proper care are essential to help people with diabetes lead healthy, normal lives. Although Type 1 diabetes accounts for less than 5% of diabetes cases in Bangladesh, access to insulin remains a fundamental right, as it is essential for survival. Therefore, uninterrupted and affordable insulin supply should be recognised as both a citizens' right and a government responsibility. Furthermore, prevention requires effective public awareness strategies. Research in Bangladesh has demonstrated the potential of faith-based communication, particularly through mosque sermons, to promote diabetes prevention at a relatively low cost. Early intervention around marriage may also help prevent gestational diabetes, with initial research indicating a possible 45% reduction. Alongside these efforts, achieving WHO-defined essential healthcare is possible within the existing budget through appropriate government initiatives, stronger health services and wider public awareness.



PROF. DR MD. FARUQUE PATHAN
Professor of Endocrinology, Senior Director, Research & Academy
BIRDEM General Hospital

Prediabetes is a stage between normal blood sugar levels and diabetes, often developing without noticeable symptoms. With an estimated 1.39 crore adults in Bangladesh living with diabetes, early risk assessment and regular screening are essential. Nearly 30–40% of people at the impaired glucose tolerance (IGT) stage may already have complications, while around 50% of patients diagnosed after five to six years may present complications. Excess weight, unhealthy diets, physical inactivity, stress, and changing urban lifestyles further increase the risk. Therefore, screening should be prioritized for adults aged 35 and above, particularly those with obesity, family history or high blood pressure. Evidence shows that losing 5–7% of body weight and at least 150 minutes of brisk walking weekly significantly reduce diabetes risk. Community-based awareness, lifestyle counselling and regular follow-up should be expanded. Identify prediabetes early through screening if having strong risk factors. If diagnosed, take action through lifestyle modifications to prevent its progression. Early action can prevent complications and reduce the growing social and economic burden of diabetes.



DR FAZILA TUN NESA MALIK
Professor of Cardiology & Chief Consultant
National Heart Foundation Hospital and Research Institute

Diabetes significantly increases the risk of cardiovascular complications, making heart disease a leading cause of illness and death among diabetic patients. By 2030, an estimated 10.3% of the global population will be living with diabetes. People with diabetes face two to four times higher lifetime risk of developing heart disease, while uncontrolled diabetes increases the risk of death from heart complications eightfold. Elevated blood glucose damages blood vessels, promotes harmful cholesterol deposits and causes blockages that can lead to heart attacks. Moreover, diabetes can damage the nerves regulating heart function, resulting in irregular heartbeat, palpitations and potentially life-threatening complications. It can also weaken and stiffen the heart muscle, eventually leading to heart failure. Therefore, early detection, particularly at the prediabetes stage, regular screening and proper diabetes management are essential. Timely treatment and awareness can help prevent cardiovascular complications, while early intervention remains important for better treatment outcomes.



DR. FARIA AFSANA
Associate Professor and Head, Department of Endocrinology
BIRDEM General Hospital
President, Bangladesh Endocrine Society

Identifying individual risk factors and determining who needs screening is essential for early diabetes prevention. For adults over eighteen with no initial risks, screening is recommended every three years starting at age thirty-five. However, individuals with risk factors such as obesity, physical inactivity, hypertension, high cholesterol, hormonal disorders like hypothyroidism or polycystic ovary syndrome, a history of gestational diabetes, or prediabetes require annual screening. Meanwhile, children experiencing overweight alongside additional risks like a family history of diabetes, maternal gestational diabetes, or hormonal conditions should begin screening around age ten or puberty. Furthermore, anyone exhibiting classic symptoms such as excessive thirst, frequent urination, constant hunger, unexplained weight loss, or fatigue must be screened immediately. Screening relies primarily on the oral glucose tolerance test, alongside fasting blood sugar or HbA1c measurements. Ultimately, recognizing these risk factors and maintaining regular check-ups ensures timely diagnosis and better health outcomes.

About Nevian Lifescience PLC.

Nevian's heritage in Bangladesh dates back to 1973, when the company began operations as Ciba-Geigy (Bangladesh) Limited, a joint venture with Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC), representing the Government of Bangladesh. Following the global merger of Ciba and Sandoz, the company subsequently became Novartis (Bangladesh) Limited. In 2026, following the acquisition of a majority stake by Radiant Pharmaceuticals Limited, the company was renamed Nevian Lifescience PLC.

Under its new identity, Nevian Lifescience PLC continues to locally manufacture Novartis' and Sandoz's global brands under license, with same ingredients, following the same manufacturing processes and adhering to the same global quality standards at the same facility, while serving as their authorized importation, marketing and distribution partner in Bangladesh.





DR MA SAMAD
Chief Executive Officer & Consultant Endocrinologist
National Healthcare Network, Bangladesh

The National Healthcare Network (NHN) under the Bangladesh Diabetic Association, operates eight hospitals and 22 centres across the country to diabetes and other healthcare services closer to communities. Through diagnosis, screening, awareness campaigns and treatment, the network served nearly 500,000 people last year, averaging 42,000 patients monthly. In addition, its Kazi Programme encourages couples to undergo diabetes and prediabetes risk assessments before marriage registration, offering tests at an affordable cost of Tk 600. Nationwide screening initiatives also focus on early detection and identifying individuals at risk. As nearly 50% of people with diabetes remain unaware of their condition, achieving global targets of diagnosing 80% of diabetes cases and bringing the diagnosed patients under control is essential. Furthermore, cardiovascular risk management requires appropriate statin use, while all people with Type 1 diabetes should have access to insulin. Through affordable and free treatment options, supported by cross-financing and government collaboration, healthcare access can be strengthened.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Implement regular diabetes and pre-diabetes screening starting at age 35 for adults, or from age 10/puberty for children with risk factors, to enable early detection
- Adopt healthier habits including reducing carbohydrate intake, eating balanced meals, engaging in physical activity, and reducing screen time to prevent Type 2 diabetes and fatty liver disease
- Recognize insulin as an absolute necessity for life and advocate for it as a basic human right and a mandatory government obligation for all Type 1 diabetes patients
- Screen women during booking visits and pre-marital or early pregnancy stages to effectively manage gestational diabetes and prevent adverse maternal and fetal complications
- Manage diabetes comprehensively by targeting not only blood glucose but also blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and associated conditions like fatty liver disease
- Utilize community-level platforms, such as religious leaders and mosques during sermons, to effectively spread public health messages and lifestyle education across the country
- Increase government involvement and financial support to make long-term diabetes care, diagnostics, and dialysis services accessible and affordable



PROF. DR. SHAMIM AHMED
Professor of Nephrology
Kidney Foundation Hospital & Research Institute
Ex-Director, National Institute of Kidney Diseases and Urology

Diabetes has become the leading cause of chronic kidney disease, accounting for 60% of dialysis patients today. This epidemic is fueled by modern lifestyles, including obesity, lack of physical activity, fast food, and excessive screen time. Furthermore, kidney damage can progress silently without heavy protein loss, making early detection vital. Simple, affordable tests such as microalbumin checks, blood pressure monitoring, ultrasound scans, and basic urine evaluations cost very little and can detect early kidney impairment. Identifying issues early allows modern medications to reverse damage and delay end-stage renal failure, preventing the catastrophic financial ruin families facing from dialysis or transplants. Beyond diabetes, hypertension, Glomerular nephritis, urinary tract obstructions, and the overuse of painkillers or unregulated medicines also contribute to kidney damage. Finally, early detection of kidney disease is vital to prevent or slow its progression. Without timely diagnosis and proper management kidney disease may progress to end stage renal disease.



PROF. DR. SHAIKH ZINNAT ARA NASREEN
Professor and Head, Department of Gynecology & Obstetrics
ZH Sikder Medical College Hospital
Vice President, OGSB

Gestational diabetes significantly affects pregnancy outcomes by causing severe complications for both mother and child. Placental hormones can interfere with insulin function, triggering hyperglycemia and excessive fetal growth known as macrosomia. This leads to shoulder dystocia, obstructed labor, birth injuries etc. Newborns face risks of hypoglycemia, sepsis, hyperbilirubinemia, hyperviscosity syndrome, and long-term predisposition to cardiovascular disease and diabetes in adulthood. Uncontrolled early diabetes can cause congenital birth defects, miscarriages, or preterm births, while putting mothers at risk of recurrent infections, preeclampsia, PPH, and ketoacidosis. Mitigating these risks requires proactive screening, ideally before conception or during early booking visits, followed by testing around 24 to 28 weeks. Recognizing high-risk factors, such as obesity, polycystic ovary syndrome, or family history, ensures timely intervention. Ultimately, raising awareness, adopting preventive strategies, and maintaining proper blood sugar control protect maternal health and secure safe pregnancy outcomes.



DR. SHAHJADA SELIM
Associate Professor of Endocrinology, Bangladesh Medical University
President Elect, Bangladesh Endocrine Society

Diabetes management must go beyond lowering blood sugar. Many patients are diagnosed and receive medication, yet their blood sugar, weight, blood pressure and cholesterol remain uncontrolled. The key challenge is to recognise diabetes as a complex metabolic disease involving insulin resistance, obesity, high blood pressure, abnormal blood lipids and chronic inflammation. Together, these factors increase the risk of heart disease, stroke, kidney failure and nerve damage. Early and comprehensive treatment is essential. Evidence on the "legacy effect" shows that achieving good control soon after diagnosis can reduce long-term complications, while years of poor control make recovery more difficult. Modern medicines offer benefits beyond blood sugar management by protecting the heart and kidneys and supporting weight loss. Alongside medication, healthy eating, regular exercise and weight management remain vital. Therefore, treatment should begin early and address the patient's overall cardiovascular and metabolic health through regular risk assessment and personalised care.



PROF. DR. M SAIFUDDIN
Professor of Endocrinology, Dhaka Medical College Hospital
General Secretary, Bangladesh Endocrine Society

Fatty liver disease, obesity and type 2 diabetes are closely linked conditions driven by excess body fat and insulin resistance. Often developing without symptoms, fatty liver can progress to inflammation, fibrosis, cirrhosis and liver cancer, while also increasing the risk of diabetes and heart disease. South Asians face additional risks as abdominal fat can accumulate even at a normal body weight. A growing belly, dark skin around the neck, skin tags, snoring and irregular menstruation may also indicate insulin resistance. Therefore, early screening is essential, particularly for people with obesity, family history of diabetes, high blood pressure or cholesterol, or previous gestational diabetes. Tests including fasting glucose, HbA1c, liver enzymes and ultrasound can help identify risks. Losing 5% of body weight can reduce liver fat, while 7–10% may improve inflammation and early scarring. Healthy eating, at least 150 minutes of weekly exercise, adequate sleep and specialist-guided treatment can prevent complications.



DR. NAZMUL KABIR QURESHI
Associate Professor & Consultant (Endocrinology)
Director, NHN Uttara Executive Center, Dhaka

Type 2 diabetes, once considered an adult disease, is increasingly affecting children and adolescents. This shift is closely linked to changing lifestyles and social structures, including rising obesity, reduced physical activity, increased screen time and greater consumption of high-calorie and fast foods containing trans fats. Around 60–80% of children diagnosed with type 2 diabetes are already overweight. Furthermore, South Asian ancestry, family history, and maternal gestational diabetes, which raises a child's lifetime risk by about 50%, contribute significantly. Fortunately, many of these preventable risk factors can be addressed through coordinated efforts among families, schools, and communities. Type 1 diabetes also requires attention, as it develops through progressive stages that may be identified through specific antibody tests before symptoms or raised blood sugar appear. Greater awareness, risk-based screening and early monitoring are essential. By recognising warning signs and addressing preventable risks, the progression of both types of diabetes and their complications can be reduced.



TANJIM FERDOUS
Head of Strategic Partnerships
The Daily Star (Moderator of the Session)

Diabetes has become one of Bangladesh's major public health challenges, with an estimated 13.9 million adults living with the condition in 2024, according to the International Diabetes Federation's 2025 Diabetes Atlas. However, around 5.4 million, or nearly 39%, remain unaware of their condition. If current trends continue, the number could rise to approximately 23.1 million by 2050. Undiagnosed or poorly controlled diabetes can lead to serious complications affecting the heart, kidneys, eyes and nerves, placing a growing burden on individuals, families and the healthcare system. In line with the World Diabetes Day 2026–27 theme, "Early Action on Diabetes", this roundtable aimed to highlight the importance of early diagnosis, examine gaps in diabetes prevention and treatment, and explore practical ways to expand public awareness, promote healthier lifestyles, improve access to screening and diagnosis, and ensure affordable treatment and quality care across Bangladesh.

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

Make climate finance fair and accessible

PM's five proposals at COP31 must be considered seriously by world leaders

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman has rightly pointed out the financial injustice faced by countries most vulnerable to climate change at a high-level session of COP31 in Antalya, Turkiye. He said climate-vulnerable countries need grants, not more loans that add to their debt burden, calling for urgent debt relief and greater international support for these countries. The points that the prime minister raised at the climate conference reflect the long-standing concerns of developing nations: despite barely contributing to the global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, these countries are being forced to spend increasingly scarce resources facing the consequences of a crisis they did little to create. Therefore, the demand for grant-based climate finance must receive serious attention from world leaders.

A recent Carbon Brief analysis found that public funding pledged under the 2015 Paris Agreement to help developing countries tackle climate change fell by more than 70 percent in 2026, following the expiry of several multi-year pledges and cuts to aid budgets by some donor countries. United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres also warned that the climate crisis was outrunning the international response. The situation raises serious concerns about the willingness of wealthy nations to honour their commitments.Against this backdrop, the five proposals presented by Prime Minister Tarique Rahman offer an important framework for addressing the shortcomings of the global climate finance system. These include allocating at least 50 percent of international climate finance to adaptation, providing debt relief through mechanisms such as climate-resilient debt clauses and debt-for-climate swaps, ensuring equitable access to climate-friendly technologies, and accelerating the transition to renewable energy through affordable financing and skills development. He also called for the adoption of the Belém-Antalya Action Mechanism, with fair financing and trade as its core principles.

Wealthy nations must increase their contributions to climate finance, ensure that adaptation receives a larger share of funding, and support debt relief mechanisms that allow vulnerable countries to invest in climate protection without compromising their development priorities.

Despite contributing less than 0.5 percent of global GHG emissions, Bangladesh remains among those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Rising sea levels, salinity intrusion, agricultural losses, floods, cyclones and extreme heat are already threatening livelihoods and placing enormous pressure on our economy. Climate-induced displacement is putting increasing pressure on our cities and their essential services.The growing costs of these impacts, alongside debt repayments and limited financial resources, are placing an increasingly heavy burden on us. This leaves the government with fewer resources to invest in climate adaptation, disaster preparedness and sustainable development. This situation must change.

Hence, COP31 must focus on action to ensure that climate finance is fair, adequate, reliable and easily accessible. Wealthy nations must increase their contributions, ensure that adaptation receives a larger share of funding, and support debt relief mechanisms that allow vulnerable countries to invest in climate protection without compromising their development priorities. Equitable access to green technologies and their transfer to developing countries must also be prioritised. The success of this year's climate conference will depend on whether the pledges and declarations made at the summit translate into tangible support for countries on the front lines of climate change.

Trafficking networks must be dismantled

Address security failures, humanitarian vulnerabilities

The rescue of 56 people from a human trafficking network in the hills of Teknaf has exposed the alarming scale of organised criminal activity along the Cox's Bazar border. This daily reports that the victims, mostly Bangladeshis, were held captive by armed traffickers who demanded exorbitant sums either for their release or for an illegal sea passage to Malaysia. Some of the victims were lured with promises of employment, only to be sold to the traffickers. The killing of an army soldier during the November 5 rescue operation demonstrates how dangerous and emboldened these criminal networks have become.

Per a survivor's account, workers seeking an honest living were abducted, blindfolded, beaten and kept in remote hideouts, with demands of up to Tk 4 lakh for their freedom. Some of the armed guards were reportedly children, while police named a 15-year-old among the accused. This points to a troubling and deep criminal ecosystem. That such operations can continue in an area with a substantial presence of law enforcement and security forces raises serious questions.

The problem, however, extends far beyond conventional law enforcement. Cox's Bazar is home to a vast Rohingya refugee population faced with uncertainty, restricted livelihoods, and declining assistance. Desperation means many are vulnerable to traffickers' false promises of employment, marriage or family reunification abroad. According to UNHCR, more than 6,500 Rohingya attempted dangerous sea crossings in 2025, with nearly 900 reported dead or missing. Trafficking networks also exploit the poverty and unemployment of Bangladeshis. That only five of the 56 rescued victims were of Rohingya origin proves that this crisis does not concern the refugees alone.

It is a matter of concern that trafficking networks have developed sophisticated recruitment, transportation, detention and extortion arrangements despite repeated operations by the security forces. The authorities must identify and completely dismantle these networks while investigating possible protection from influential quarters. Greater coordination among the police, Border Guard Bangladesh, the army, the refugee camp authorities and maritime agencies is essential. Cross-border collaboration is equally important to disrupt trafficking routes towards Myanmar, Thailand and Malaysia.

The rescued victims must receive protection, medical support and justice without being criminalised for their circumstances. Stronger community awareness, safe livelihood options, and meaningful international efforts towards a sustainable solution to the Rohingya crisis are imperative. Unless both the criminal networks and the vulnerabilities they exploit are addressed, Teknaf's hills and coastline will remain a fertile ground for human traffickers.

Our students deserve a better university admission system

BLOWIN' IN THE WIND



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

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

Here we are, at the beginning of another admission season. This is the time when public university teachers are divided into two groups: one group eagerly signs up for the paid services of invigilation, script-checking and result publication, while the other group avoids the non-compulsory duties. To make sure that the current students are not affected, the unit-wise admission tests are usually held during the weekends. The process continues across several weeks, with evaluation of the answer scripts, result publication, interviews for subject allocation, preparation of waiting lists, notification of vacant seats, internal migration, and late enrolments. The saga continues with each episode pitched as a necessary stage for an incoming student. For private universities, however, the process is much more simplified: results and admission formalities are completed within a week.

This year, Dhaka University's admission tests are scheduled for December 5-26. By the time these students have their freshers' orientation, some of their contemporaries at private universities may already be approaching the completion of a semester. The exact difference depends on the institutions and intake dates. But it raises an uncomfortable question: how much time do we consider reasonable to spend entering higher education, and who takes responsibility for that time? Many students wait to hear from their preferred institutions before choosing between those and other options. Oftentimes, the reason is financial: public universities are heavily subsidised, and the older ones enjoy a solid market reputation. Only in recent times have some of the top private universities become more preferred as they ensure timely graduation and a professional and world-class learning environment. However, coordination between public and private intakes remains notably weak, and each institution is expected to manage its own affairs.

Back in 2020, to spare students from the hassle of going to different corners of the country to take admission tests, the University Grants Commission (UGC) proposed a cluster admission system. The old public universities exercised their autonomy to disregard this prescription. The rift was once again apparent this year when some of these universities defied UGC's proposal to shift the admission calendar by a month to accommodate the HSC students who have been given a second chance to improve their scores. DU and Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) retained their original schedules, while Rajshahi and Jagannath universities adopted different arrangements for supplementary candidates. The second chance initiative should have been accompanied by an agreed admission pathway. Private universities also need guidance on whether they can offer conditional admissions to the supplementary examinees.

One thing is certain: our tertiary admission system is in a state of disarray. Even within a single university, there are various assessment mechanisms. At DU, most units combine 60 marks of MCQs with 40 marks of written assessment. Fine Arts and the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) have different arrangements. After noticing poor performance among students who entered the system only through MCQ tests, DU decided to return to the time-consuming written components. While they can reveal a candidate's reasoning, expression, and ability to construct an answer, they also pose the possibility of subjective grading. Examiners working under a strict deadline or without grading rubrics may not be able to do justice to the scripts. The inconsistency in marking can change a student's future forever. The UGC can take up a project simply to decide on the assessment instruments for admission tests.

My experience tells me that many of my colleagues approach admission tests as a system to terminate as many applicants as possible. We rarely design the questions to judge students' readiness to learn. The "weed out" policy relies on difficult questions that encourage repeated patterns and rote learning, allowing an admission cottage industry to thrive. Each university must have its teaching and learning centre that will conduct thorough research on their selection methods to decide whether admission scores correspond with first-year performance, persistence, or eventual completion. Does the written component identify capabilities missed by MCQs? Do the tests work comparably for students from different educational backgrounds? The admission test scripts can provide the universities with primary data on the recruitment process to select students for knowledge production.

The treatment of SSC and HSC results deserves similar scrutiny. While most universities consider previous public examination results, their numerical share in the final ranking is not that significant. The tertiary system begins with a mindset that to reach the university's own assessment, students must have additional knowledge. If that is truly the case, the higher secondary and tertiary curricula must be aligned.



An admission test in progress at Dhaka University. FILE PHOTO: **PRABIR DAS**

It is a no-brainer that shared examinations can reduce travelling, worries and costs caused by multiple applications. The engineering and medical systems have exhibited so by reducing repetition through cluster admissions. The chaos in public university admissions is enabled by the vested interest of stakeholders who find the admission season financially rewarding. We can argue that one examination does not, by itself, create an efficient admission process; applicants still need offers, choices, confirmation deadlines, and clear migration rules. When a preferred university completes admissions later, a student may leave their secured place in another institution. The vacancy then passes down the waiting list. Universities become connected through applicants' decisions, whether their administrations coordinate or not.

A common application service could help address this gap. In the UK, for instance, the Universities and Colleges Applications Services (UCAS) offers a useful example of a centralised application system where universities retain their entry requirements and admission decisions. In the US, the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) addresses a different question: whether institutions can use a common score alongside other evidence. Bangladesh could consider both ideas without requiring every programme to select students identically. Coordination must continue after enrolment, with an option of credit transfer and migration among the UGC-approved universities. The primary benefit of coordination is a centralised academic calendar. If private universities can operate under published calendars, public universities can, too.

Unfortunately, most of the public universities are notorious for deviating from their plans. Different disciplines can require different teaching arrangements while still providing students with dependable completion dates. Consequently, many of these programmes fail to leverage study abroad programmes or internationalisation. Scholarship holders need results before deadlines. A partnership becomes difficult to implement when neither students nor their overseas hosts can confidently identify an available semester.

As teachers, we ask students to respect deadlines because we consider time management a part of their education. Our institutions owe them the same discipline. When a university loses a month, its students are delayed in joining the job market while their competitors get a head start. This uncertainty, expenses and postponed opportunities should be central to every debate about the university admission schedule.

We can't adapt our way out of climate crisis

Ejaj Ahmad is the founder of the Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center (BYLC) and the Global Youth Leadership Center (GYLC).

Sir David King is founder and chair of the Climate Crisis Advisory Group, founder of the Centre for Climate Repair at the University of Cambridge, and former chief scientific adviser of the UK government.

EJAJ AHMAD *and* **DAVID KING**

Bangladesh has done very little to cause climate change. The average Bangladeshi emits about 0.6 tonnes of carbon dioxide a year—a small fraction of the global average. Its share of all the CO2 humanity has emitted since the Industrial Revolution is about 0.11 percent. But it pays one of the highest prices: the World Bank estimated in 2021 that up to 1.99 crore Bangladeshis could be forced to move within the country by 2050 because of climate change.

For more than three decades, the world's response to climate change has rested on two pillars: i) mitigation, which means cutting emissions; and ii) adaptation, which means protecting people from the damage. As delegates meet at COP31 in Antalya, most of the argument is again about money for both. But the data now shows that these two pillars cannot get us out of the crisis.

CO2 in the atmosphere reached about 431 parts per million in June 2026, according to NOAA. Before the Industrial Revolution, it was 280. For 800,000 years, it never rose above 300. Earth is also trapping heat faster than expected: the rate roughly doubled between 2005 and 2019. August 2026 was the hottest month ever recorded. The UN Environment Programme now says overshooting the 1.5-degree-Celsius limit is inevitable.

Think of a bathtub. The tap is still running: humanity is adding over 50 billion tonnes of greenhouse gases (GHGs) every year. The tub is already overflowing, with over a trillion tonnes of excess CO2 in the air. Net zero turns off the tap. Adaptation mops the floor. Neither drains the tub. Even if emissions stopped tomorrow, the carbon already up there would keep the planet hot for centuries.

The world needs a third job: restoration and repair. That means removing CO2 at the scale of billions of tonnes a year and stabilising Earth's systems that are drifting towards tipping points.

Alongside finance, governments in Antalya should commit to three things: a coalition of willing countries to fund stabilisation research, on the model of the 57 nations that met in Santa Marta in April to plan a move away from fossil fuels; public research spending on the scale of Mission Innovation; and a seat at the table for vulnerable nations from day one. Bangladesh, a former chair of the Climate Vulnerable Forum, is well-placed to lead that call.

This is the case made in Stabilising Earth's Systems, a new report from the Climate Crisis Advisory Group. It asks governments to do two things. First, rebuild the satellites and models that tell us how much heat Earth is trapping and how close we are to the edge. Second, fund research into frontier options, including large-scale carbon removal. It calls for research under open, strict governance, not deployment. Research that rules out a dangerous idea is as valuable as research that finds a safe one.

Disasters cause over $200 billion a year globally in direct losses, and more than $2.3 trillion once cascading costs are counted. On current policies, the world could lose around half of global GDP between 2070 and 2090. A research programme costing a few billion dollars would be less than one percent of what disasters cost the world in a single year.

Where should that research look? We believe the answer is the ocean. It covers 71 percent of the planet. It has already absorbed over a quarter of the CO2 we have emitted and more than 90 percent of the extra heat. Yet we have better maps of the Moon than of our own seafloor, and warming is weakening its ability to take up carbon. Ocean-based removal, from restoring mangroves and seagrass to cultivating seaweed and microalgae, is young and mostly unproven. That's a reason to study it, not to ignore it. Look at solar power: too expensive to compete 20 years ago, widely adopted today.

Bangladesh has a stake in this. Following the settlement of its maritime boundaries with Myanmar in 2012 and India in 2014, it gained internationally recognised maritime rights over around 118,813 square kilometres of the Bay of Bengal. The country also shares the Sundarbans with India, the world's largest mangrove forest and an important natural carbon store. The CCAG report argues that research should be designed and led by the most climate-exposed countries wherever possible. Bangladesh should not simply be a beneficiary of this research, but a partner and a testing ground for responsible innovation.

COP31 can help. Alongside finance, governments in Antalya should commit to three things: a coalition of willing countries to fund stabilisation research, on the model of the 57 nations that met in Santa Marta in April to plan a move away from fossil fuels; public research spending on the scale of Mission Innovation; and a seat at the table for vulnerable nations from day one. Bangladesh, a former chair of the Climate Vulnerable Forum, is well-placed to lead that call.

But leadership cannot stop with governments. Young people must help shape the research, technologies and institutions that will decide their future. The world has 1.2 billion people aged 15-24, and nearly 90 percent of them live in developing countries. Climate work offers them three jobs: cut emissions, protect people, and repair the atmosphere. The third is the least crowded and perhaps the most important. No one has yet removed carbon at the scale required. It is one of the biggest entrepreneurial opportunities of this century. The work must start now.

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Saving banks takes more than clearing bad loans



Md. Badrul Millat Ibne Hannan is associate member at CPA Australia and certified financial consultant at IFC Inc. in Canada. He can be reached at badrul01913@gmail.com.

■ MD. BADRUL MILLAT IBNE HANNAN



FILE VISUAL: **SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR**

Financial strength makes a bank resilient, but public confidence keeps it alive. People deposit money in banks expecting to withdraw it when needed and receive the agreed interest or profit. However, when irregular lending, influential borrowers' reluctance to repay, and weak regulatory oversight undermine bank assets, the resulting crisis threatens the wider economy.

The current situation in Bangladesh's banking sector reflects this reality. At the end of June 2026, non-performing loans (NPLs) stood at Tk 606,555 crore, accounting for 32.78 percent of total outstanding loans, according to Bangladesh Bank data. In these circumstances, the challenge is not simply to reduce bad loans but to restore banks' financial strength and rebuild depositors' confidence.

The success of banking reforms should not be measured solely by a reduction in the NPL ratio. It should also depend on cash recovered, banks' ability to meet deposit obligations through their own income, and their capacity to resume lending to productive sectors. Genuine recovery must begin with recognising losses, recovering money from those responsible, rebuilding income-generating capacity and capital, and protecting depositors.

Following the Great Depression of 1929, around 9,000 US banks suspended operations between 1930 and 1933. In 1933, a bank holiday and emergency banking legislation were introduced. The subsequent establishment of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), with deposit insurance taking effect in 1934, created an institutional framework to protect depositors. The FDIC's historical account of the Great Depression and the introduction of deposit insurance illustrates the importance of institutional safeguards in restoring public confidence. The lesson is clear: restoring a banking system requires more than financial assistance to struggling institutions. A credible mechanism to protect depositors' money is equally essential.

In the early 1990s, Sweden's banking sector suffered substantial losses following a housing market collapse. The government took control of the troubled Nordbanken and separated its performing assets from its distressed ones. Viable loans and businesses remained with the bank, while NPLs and risky assets were transferred to a state-owned asset management company called Securum. Securum managed and gradually sold these assets to maximise recovery. This arrangement gave Nordbanken room to restructure and resume its core operations. The intervention's direct fiscal cost was approximately 4.2 percent of GDP, but subsequent asset recoveries and the sale of the government's ownership stake helped reduce the net cost.

Following the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997, South Korea established a 39.2-trillion-KRW fund through the Korea Asset Management Corporation (KAMCO), which acquired distressed loans worth 111.3 trillion KRW. KAMCO employed several recovery mechanisms, including international auctions, asset-backed securitisation, participation by foreign investors, and debt-to-equity swaps. Eventually, recoveries exceeded the fund's initial investment by 4.3 trillion KRW. According to KAMCO's account of its role in resolving the Asian Financial Crisis, this experience demonstrates how professional asset management and a well-planned recovery strategy can improve the effectiveness of public investment.

Japan, meanwhile, experienced a prolonged banking crisis during the 1990s, partly because the true scale of NPLs was concealed and financially weak institutions were artificially kept afloat. Authorities eventually addressed the crisis through stricter asset assessments, disposal of bad loans, government capital support, and restructuring of weak banks. Japan's lesson is clear: delaying recognition of losses deepens a crisis and makes recovery harder.

Greece's Hercules Asset Protection Scheme, introduced in 2019, took a different approach. NPLs were securitised into Senior, Mezzanine and Junior tranches. The Senior Tranche received a conditional government guarantee, while arrangements were made to sell the riskier portions to investors. NPLs in Greece's banking sector declined from approximately 81 billion euros in 2019 to around six billion euros by the end of 2024. However, these loans did not disappear from the economy; recovery efforts continue.

One important question for Bangladesh is what happens when a bank writes off a loan? A write-off can reduce the burden of distressed assets on a bank's balance sheet, but it does not automatically extinguish the borrower's legal obligation to repay. A loan write-off, a loan sale and a loan waiver are three different things.

Banks, therefore, must retain their legal right to recover outstanding amounts after a write-off. Legal action should be pursued against wilful defaulters, those involved in misappropriation of funds and borrowers who obtained loans through fraudulent means. This requires enforcing collateral and identifying the assets of actual beneficial owners. Entrepreneurs facing temporary business difficulties may be allowed to restructure their loans. But repeatedly granting concessions to borrowers who can repay but deliberately refuse to do so must end.

Removing NPLs from a bank's balance sheet does not automatically generate cash. Banks must still repay depositors and provide the agreed interest or profit. Accounting changes alone cannot solve the problem; banks must restore their income-generating capacity and cash flows. This requires recovering cash from collectable loans, selling distressed assets at transparent market prices, and generating regular income through government securities and properly assessed productive investments. Banks must also restore a sustainable balance between deposit costs and income from lending and other investments.

The distinction between liquidity and capital is equally important. A central bank can provide conditional lending support for a liquidity shortage, but a capital shortfall requires genuine capital. Therefore, after recognising their losses, weak banks need shareholder participation, fresh private investment and, where necessary, government recapitalisation subject to strict conditions. International experience shows that no single measure is sufficient to resolve a banking crisis. Bangladesh needs a coordinated recovery strategy built around several steps.

First, drawing on Sweden's experience, an independent Asset Quality Review (AQR) should establish the true financial condition of every bank. Based on the findings, banks should be classified into three categories: viable, suitable for restructuring, and non-viable. Each category should have a separate resolution strategy. Second, distressed loans and asset recovery must be professionally managed. South Korea's KAMCO and Malaysia's Danaharta show that distressed loans can be managed more effectively through specialised institutions. Bangladesh could establish an independent National Asset Management Company to acquire selected distressed loans at transparent market prices and oversee collateral management, auctions and professional recovery. However, Malaysia's reported recovery rate of 80.2 percent referred to assets restructured or sold by the end of 1999, not all loans acquired by the institution. This distinction matters when evaluating an asset management company's performance. Alongside identifying the assets of wilful defaulters and pursuing legal recovery, loans to potentially viable businesses should be restructured where appropriate. Any capital support to weak banks must depend on meaningful changes in management, accountability and corporate governance.

Ireland's National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) acquired loans worth 31.8 billion euros and repaid its entire funding by 2020. By the end of 2024, cumulative cash income had reached 48.3 billion euros. However, the market value of the acquired loans was 26.2 billion euros, while an additional 5.6 billion euros represented state support to banks. The Irish Comptroller and Auditor General's review of NAMA's performance details the agency's loan acquisitions and repayment of its funding. In contrast, the Indonesian Bank Restructuring Agency (IBRA) recovered only around 23 percent of the original loan value through sales between 1999 and 2004. These experiences show why transparency is essential in government-backed banking interventions. Asset valuation, public support costs and loan recovery efficiency must be carefully monitored

Third, timelines, transparency and accountability must be ensured. A three-year banking recovery programme should include quarterly, bank-by-bank disclosures of cash recoveries, newly classified NPLs, capital shortfalls, deposit costs, and operating income. Shareholders and directors must also be held accountable. Depositors must be protected, and non-viable banks resolved in an orderly manner.

The success of banking reforms should not be measured solely by a reduction in the NPL ratio. It should also depend on cash recovered, banks' ability to meet deposit obligations through their own income, and their capacity to resume lending to productive sectors. Saving banks is not simply about removing NPLs from their balance sheets. Genuine recovery must begin with recognising losses, recovering money from those responsible, rebuilding income-generating capacity and capital, and protecting depositors. The savings of ordinary people must never become the price of granting financial relief to influential borrowers.

Why falling costs don't always mean cheaper food



Md. Mominur Rahman is assistant professor at the Bangladesh Institute of Governance and Management (BIGM). He can be reached at mominur.rahman@bigm.edu.bd.

■ MD. MOMINUR RAHMAN

Food prices in Bangladesh are shaped by more than production and import costs. Food passes through multiple hands between the farm or port and the consumer's kitchen. The final price includes transport, storage and handling costs, as well as traders' margins. Consumers can feel the effects of rising international prices or a depreciating taka fairly quickly. However, when import prices fall, or supplies improve, retail prices do not always follow as quickly. This raises an important question: why do consumers continue to pay high prices even when some of the underlying costs have declined?

Several factors affect food prices. For imported products, these include international prices, freight, insurance, customs duties, port charges and the exchange rate. Domestic distribution adds transport, storage, handling and financing costs. Seasonal shortages, floods and rising fuel prices can also affect supplies.

Recent inflation data reinforces this concern. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), food inflation increased to 7.22 percent in September 2026, from 7.02 percent in August. Although this was lower than the 7.64 percent recorded in September 2025, food prices were still rising. On October 13, The Daily Star reported that fine rice in Dhaka was selling at Tk 74-75 per kilogramme, compared with Tk 72 a week earlier. Medium-grain rice rose from Tk 55-62 to Tk 58-65 per kilogramme, while coarse rice remained unchanged at Tk 50-55. Even modest price increases matter when families are already struggling with their food budgets.

One question merits particular attention: how much of the price consumers pay reflects production or import costs, and how much is attributable to distribution? A Bangladesh Bank study, titled A Survey Report on Trends and Causes of High Food Inflation in Rural and Urban Areas, examined price disparities across food supply chains. Its December 2024 case study of locally produced onions found that distributors, wholesalers and retailers applied mark-ups of around 2 percent, 3 percent and 25 percent, respectively, to their purchase prices. These figures relate to one commodity at a particular time and cannot be taken as representative of the wider food market. Nevertheless, they highlight the importance of examining retail-level costs and margins.

Research by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) raises similar questions. A study presented in July 2026 examined ten key commodities, including rice, lentils, onions, potatoes, eggs, fish and chicken. Based on 820 interviews with market actors in ten major markets across Dhaka division, it traced supply chains between producers and retailers. The findings revealed significant price disparities between producers and retailers, with green chillies recording the highest increase of 116 percent, followed by rice at 100 percent, onions at 87 percent and lentils at 78 percent. Such differences do not automatically indicate excessive profits. Prices are influenced by transport, storage, product quality, spoilage and financing.



Bangladesh needs a regular food price monitoring system to examine the rise and fall patterns. FILE PHOTO: **STAR**

Several factors affect food prices. For imported products, these include international prices, freight, insurance, customs duties, port charges and the exchange rate. Domestic distribution adds transport, storage, handling and financing costs. Seasonal shortages, floods and rising fuel prices can also affect supplies. Hence, a decline in international prices may not immediately translate into lower retail prices, particularly when traders still hold stocks purchased at higher prices. However, such explanations should be supported by solid cost data, not simply taken on faith.

Another issue is that prices in some markets appear to rise faster than they fall. Traders may quickly raise selling prices when import costs increase, but pass on reductions more slowly. Existing stocks, contractual agreements and limited competition may partly explain this delay. It would be unfair to assume that all traders are acting improperly. Bangladesh should introduce a regular food price monitoring system to examine these patterns. The Bangladesh Trade and Tariff Commission (BTTC), Ministry of Commerce, Department of Agricultural Marketing, Bangladesh Competition Commission and BBS could coordinate the collection and publication of comparable farm-gate, wholesale and retail prices. For imported products such as edible oil, wheat and lentils, the data should also cover international prices, exchange rates, duties and estimated landed costs. For locally produced items, it should include farm-gate prices, seasonal production, transport costs and retail prices. This would help identify where price differences arise and why.

Such information would also help policymakers choose the right response. If prices are rising at both farm-gate and retail levels, the problem may be linked to production shortages, imports or transportation. Where farmers receive low prices while consumers pay high ones, the distribution chain warrants closer scrutiny. Authorities should investigate whether the difference reflects storage costs, market concentration, a lack of competition or other factors. All assessments must account for actual distribution costs and compare similar products and grades over the same period.

Effective competition policy must form part of the solution. Where there is evidence of collusion, artificial shortages or other anti-competitive behaviour, the relevant authorities should act. Improving transport and storage infrastructure is also critical. Poor rural roads, inadequate warehousing and cold storage, and delays in loading and unloading can increase food distribution costs. Perishable products are particularly vulnerable to spoilage. Improving storage, modernising wholesale markets and upgrading transport systems can help reduce these losses. Import policy also requires attention. When domestic production is insufficient to meet demand, timely imports and appropriate tariff adjustments can help stabilise supplies. But lowering import taxes does not guarantee that consumers will benefit from lower food prices. Authorities should monitor whether such reductions are reflected in landed, wholesale and retail prices.

Finally, food policy should not be judged solely by harvests, import volumes or inflation rates. It should also be evaluated on whether consumers can buy food at fair and reasonable prices. Falling international prices and improved domestic production are of limited value if their benefits are not reflected in household food budgets. Bangladesh needs to monitor what happens to food prices at every stage of the supply chain.

DHAKA SATURDAY NOVEMBER 14, 2026, KARTIK 29, 1433 BS

SPORT



Balancing act! Bangladesh's 19-year-old Wonderboy Farhaan Ali Wahid cushions the ball on his head as Hamza Choudhury, Jamal Bhuyan, Tariq Kazi, and Bishwanath Ghosh watch on during yesterday's training. Fresh off a dazzling solo goal in the 4-0 rout of Sri Lanka, the electric left-winger will be out to weave more of that same magic against Pakistan in the SAFF Championship semifinal today as Bangladesh chase a fourth final. PHOTO: **FIROZ AHMED**

Dooley meets Maradona's 'Little Master' again

KHALID HOSSAIN

When Thomas Dooley and Nolberto Solano take their places in the technical areas at the National Stadium tonight, two former international midfielders turned tacticians will face off in a high-stakes SAFF Championship semifinal. Although their playing careers overlapped for years and bridged the turn of the millennium, the two crossed paths only once on the pitch, making their Dhaka touchline meeting a rare reunion decades in the making.

Appointed in May, Bangladesh head coach Dooley carries a pedigree shaped by his own dual-national journey. Born in West Germany to an American serviceman father and a German mother, he won the 1991 Bundesliga with Kaiserslautern and the 1997 UEFA Cup with Schalke 04 before US head coach Bora Milutinovic recruited him ahead of the 1994 World Cup.

Dooley went on to earn 81 caps and score seven goals for the US between 1992 and 1999, playing every minute on home soil in 1994 and captaining the side at France 1998 -- achievements that secured his 2004 National Soccer Hall of Fame induction.

His experience as a dual-national player later shaped his coaching blueprint. Across two stints with the Philippines in 2014--2018 and 2022, he systematically integrated European-born diaspora players, orchestrating a famous 3-2 World Cup qualifying upset over North Korea and guiding the Azkals to their first-ever AFC Asian Cup qualification in 2018 before bringing that template to Bangladesh, guiding a backline that navigated the SAFF group stage without conceding a single goal.

Opposite him stands Solano, the Peruvian attacking midfielder who became a cult hero at Newcastle United for his crossing and dead-ball mastery. Having earned the nickname El Maestrito -- "The Little Master" -- from Diego Maradona during their Boca Juniors days, Solano became the first Peruvian to play in the Premier League in 1998. Across more than 300 appearances in English football for Newcastle United, Aston Villa, West Ham United, Leicester City and Hull City, he tallied 49 goals and 62 assists.

Capped 95 times by Peru, scoring 20 goals between 1994 and 2009, Solano transitioned into coaching as Ricardo Gareca's assistant from 2015 to 2022, helping end Peru's 36-year World Cup drought in 2018 and reach the 2019 Copa America final. After coaching spells at clubs in Peru, Sweden and England, as well as managing Peru's U-23 side, he took charge of Pakistan in July 2025, inheriting a programme disrupted by repeated FIFA suspensions and without a domestic Premier League since 2018-19.

Between 1996 and 1998, their international careers overlapped across three USA-Peru friendlies, though they shared the pitch only once. Solano played and scored in Peru's 4-1 Lima win in October 1996, and both missed Peru's 1-0 San Diego victory in January 1997, before Dooley captained the US to a 1-0 win over a Solano-featuring Peru in Miami in February 1998.

Twenty-eight years on, their paths cross again under the Dhaka lights, with a SAFF final berth on the line.



PHOTO: PFF

Bangladesh's fourth or Pakistan's first?

A blockbuster 'final' beckons

SPORTS REPORTER

Former champions Bangladesh stand one win away from their first SAFF Championship final since 2005, but a resurgent Pakistan, strengthened by an influx of European-based players, stand in their way when the two sides meet in Saturday's second semifinal at the National Stadium.

The match kicks off at 8:30pm, following the first semifinal between holders India and dark horses Bhutan at 3:30pm.

For Bangladesh, it is a chance to move within one win of a second regional title following their only triumph, coming at home in 2003, sandwiched between two final appearances, and six group-stage exits in the last eight editions.

This time, however, Thomas Dooley's side have given supporters reason to dream. Backed by overseas-based players, including Sheffield United midfielder Hamza Choudhury, Bangladesh topped Group A, scoring five goals and conceding none. Their emphatic 4-0 win over Sri Lanka on Wednesday, following an earlier victory over Bhutan, has given them all the necessary momentum before a fixture which Bangladesh head coach Thomas Dooley has labelled "the final".

Pakistan, meanwhile, have made an uneven but encouraging start under coach Nolberto Solano. They pushed defending champions India close in a 3-2 defeat after trailing 3-0, then bounced back with a 3-0 win over former champions Maldives. Their resilience was also evident in September, when they came from two goals down to draw 2-2 with a higher-ranked Philippines side in the FIFA ASEAN Cup.

Their campaign has been shaped by the late arrival of five overseas-based regulars -- Abdullah Iqbal, Easah Suliman, Adil Nabi, Abdul Samad Arshad and Ali Akbar Khan -- who missed the group stage because it fell outside the FIFA international window.

Sweden-based Iqbal and former England youth international Suliman, who plays in Azerbaijan, strengthen the backline alongside Iqbal, while Nabi, a West Bromwich Albion academy product who plies his trade in Greece, adds creativity in midfield. Denmark-based Abdul Samad offers another attacking option, with six-foot-two Ali Akbar providing a further presence up front. How quickly the newly arrived players can settle into the side, however, remains a question.

Pakistan's push for a maiden title comes against a difficult domestic backdrop, having been devoid of top-tier action since the 2018-19 season and faced multiple FIFA suspensions since 2017, the latest of which was lifted in March last year.

FIFA RANKING
Bangladesh: 182
Pakistan: 197

HEAD-TO-HEAD
Bangladesh: 7
Pakistan: 6
Draw: 4

IN SAFF C'SHIP:
Bangladesh: 3
Pakistan: 2
Draw: 2

They have struggled to make the final despite reaching the semifinals on several occasions. Maldives and Bangladesh eliminated them in 2003 and 2005 respectively, while India knocked them out in 1997 and 2018. They have reached the last four in Dhaka on three of their previous four visits, but this will be their first semifinal against hosts Bangladesh.

In their last 10 encounters spanning three decades, Bangladesh won four times, drew five and lost once. Bangladesh won 1-0 in 2018, the last time the two teams met. Dooley, however, is well aware of the quality Pakistan's reinforcements bring. "They [Pakistan] also have incredible football knowledge because they are playing at a higher level in Europe," Dooley told reporters before yesterday's training session at Bashundhara Kings Arena.

The Bangladesh coach, however, is confident his players can reproduce the intensity they showed against Sri Lanka. "We just have to do the same thing. We have to show the fans that we can play football... and that's what we have to show Pakistan too."

Bangladesh are expected to retain the balance that served them well against Sri Lanka, with Hamza, Shamit Shome and Quazem Shah central to their midfield control and left-forward Farhaan Ali Wahid looking to build on his outstanding solo goal. The hosts will, however, have to adjust their backline following Saad Uddin's injury, which ruled the right-back out of the tournament.

The introduction of Video Assistant Referee (VAR) for the knockout rounds adds another dimension to a contest that promises to be physical and closely fought.

With Bangladesh seeking a return to the final and Pakistan chasing a historic first under the glare of the Dhaka floodlights, the stage is set for a "final" before the final, where desperation, diaspora ambition and tactical moves collide.



"Obviously if you are more rested it helps. But this game is, for us, a final because I think Pakistan are one of the best teams."

THOMAS DOOLEY, Bangladesh coach

"There's a lot of talk about Hamza Choudhury, but we have Abdullah Iqbal, Easah Suliman, Adil Nabi, and Abdul Arshad. They're amazing players."

YOUSUF IJAZ BUTT, Pakistan goalkeeper

Mosaddeak proves value of defined role

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

For Rangpur Division wicketkeeper-batter Mim Mosaddeak, success in first-class cricket has been a long time coming.

After making his debut in 2017, the 31-year-old managed just three appearances until 2022, with established names such as Dhiman Ghosh, Litton Das and Akbar Ali ahead of him in the wicketkeeping pecking order. A star-studded batting line-up further restricted his opportunities.

Even when he finally featured in six of Rangpur's seven matches last season, Mosaddeak managed only 222 runs at an average of 18.50. An unsettled batting position was a major obstacle, as he was frequently moved between opening and the lower middle order.

"When I started playing, I couldn't bat in a fixed position. Sometimes I opened, sometimes I batted at seven or five. My batting position was never settled," he told The Daily Star.

This season, however, everything fell into place. Given a consistent opportunity to open throughout the National Cricket League (NCL), Mosaddeak delivered the best first-class campaign of his career, scoring 727 runs in 12 innings at an average of 60.58. He emerged as the competition's leading run-scorer heading into the final round, with three centuries



PHOTO: **BCB**

and four half-centuries, registering at least one fifty in every match he played.

His performances were particularly valuable for a depleted Rangpur side. One of his finest contributions came against Chattogram in Khulna, where he scored 145 off 317 balls on the final day, rescuing his team from defeat and securing a draw.

"We were completely on the back foot, and the situation was such that if I got out, we would lose the match. So I tried to bat with patience. For me, that innings has been the best one so far," he said.

His breakthrough was even more remarkable considering the injury setback he faced before the tournament. Mosaddeak fractured his leg while playing football during a warm-up session, just before a three-week fitness camp and the subsequent fitness test. Doctors initially warned that he might not be able to play.

"I recovered to some extent about a week before the fitness test. I somehow passed the test and started practising, but I couldn't prepare properly. I had only around a week to get ready before the tournament," he said.

Another important factor was finally finding a fixed role. Although primarily an opener, Mosaddeak also took over wicketkeeping duties after Akbar Ali left for Nepal following the first three matches. He kept wickets in two games, including against Barishal in Sylhet, where he scored 77 and 121 despite spending nearly 100 overs behind the stumps.

After discussing his role with coach Nazmul Hossain, Mosaddeak made it clear that he wanted to continue opening. The coach agreed, provided he adjusted to balancing both responsibilities. With runs coming consistently at the top, there was little reason to move him down the order.

Despite this outstanding season, Mosaddeak remains realistic about his career ambitions. Having played in the First Division Cricket League since 2015, he has occasionally received offers from Premier Division clubs and played a few matches at that level.

"I don't want to join a team just to warm the bench. I would like to play in the Premier Division only if I am assured of getting regular opportunities. Otherwise, I'm happy with how things are going in my career," he said.

For Mosaddeak, the priority is not the prestige of a league but the opportunity to play and perform. After years of waiting, changing positions and overcoming injury, his breakthrough season has shown what consistent opportunities and a defined role can bring.

"When I started playing, I couldn't bat in a fixed position. Sometimes I opened, sometimes I batted at seven or five. My batting position was never settled."

'Australia experience to boost Tigers'

STAR SPORTS REPORT

Bangladesh's batters are searching for lost confidence following last week's 1-0 home series defeat to the West Indies. However, they face an immediate and formidable trial by fire: Sunday's first Test against defending World Test Champions South Africa on a bouncy Wanderers track.

Historically, it is rare for even established Bangladesh batters to find their feet in South Africa. The numbers make for grim reading as mainstays Mushfiqur Rahim and Litton Das average just 22.41 and 24.75 respectively in the country, while number three Mominul Haque averages slightly over 13 across eight innings. Compounding matters, Mahmudul Hasan Joy, who became the first Bangladesh batter to hit a Test ton in South Africa during their 2022 tour, was ruled out through injury.

Despite these historical struggles, newly-appointed batting consultant Dale Benkenstein believes their recent 1-1 series draw in Australia provides the perfect blueprint for success.

"The real test will be how quickly we adapt," Benkenstein told reporters yesterday ahead of Bangladesh's second practice session in Johannesburg. "The skill set that South Africa have, they're going to come with pace and bounce. But they will have a lot of confidence having faced [Mitchell] Starc and [Josh] Hazlewood over the last couple of months.

WHAT TO WATCH

T Sports
SAFF C'ship
Semifinal
India vs Bhutan
Live from 3:00 pm
Bangladesh vs Pakistan
Live from 8:30 pm
Sony Sports 1,2,5

ACC U-19 Asia Cup
Final
India vs Pakistan
Live from 11:00 am
UEFA Nations League
Live from 1:45 am (Sunday):
Portugal vs Denmark
Romania vs Poland

DHAKA SATURDAY NOVEMBER 14, 2026, KARTIK 29, 1433 BS

SPORT



Fast bowler Mahli Beardman took 6-24 to steer Australia to a seven-wicket win over England, who were bowled out for 131 in Perth yesterday, in the first of three ODIs. He became the first Australian since Tony Dodemaide in 1988 to take five wickets on debut.

DURBACHARA'S DARING GIRLS CONQUER NATIONAL STAGE

ANIS MONDOL

Stepping onto the school field in Durbachara on a weekday afternoon, roughly 20 kilometres from Kushtia town, sounds arrive before sights: a chorus of joyful chatter ringing with the confidence of world-beaters.

Here in Ujanpara Union in the country's western region, after-school practice is no longer a mere pastime. For the girls of Durbachara Bohumukhi High School, they play to win everything in their path.

And they keep winning. For two consecutive years, students from this remote village school have claimed the crown as national handball champions.

The ripple effects have transformed the district. Teachers from prominent town colleges now queue up at school gates, eager to secure these trailblazers for higher secondary classes. Career paths in services teams like the Bangladesh Army are opening up, with players earning coveted spots at BKSP and direct call-ups to the national squad.





A relentless ascent

The path to glory proved steep. When sports teacher Saidul Islam joined around 2022–23, his initial goal focused on a boys' team. When that stalled, a wider net caught 40 girls. Today, 16 form the bedrock of a fierce squad.

"Resistance came from everywhere," Saidul recalls. Yet, with a headmaster standing "like a shield," barriers tumbled down.

Headmaster Billal Hossain notes the shift: "People viewed sports as a distraction." Once national titles followed, "public perception flipped overnight."

Financial constraints proved daunting as buying kits out of limited school funds required scavenging support from local leaders and the administration. Behind the scenes, training was punishing. "We skipped every holiday through Ramadan, Eid, and Puja," Saidul notes. "The girls worked day and night."

That grit paid off at the 53rd Summer Handball, where Durbachara tore through the four-team competition without dropping a game, scoring 75 goals and conceding only five along the way.

Breaking moulds, changing minds

For the players, victory represents a personal revolution against traditional expectations.

Maimuna Khatun commutes seven kilometres daily by van from Naturiya village. Reflecting on the local skepticism, she recalls: "Harsh words greeted us at first. Family and neighbours would ask what a girl expected to achieve by playing games." Today, champions earn universal smiles, with former critics now pushing their own daughters onto the pitch.

Team captain Mst Korobi shares the pitch with her younger sister, Tasfia Akter Kuheli. While their mother harboured early doubts, their father offered unshakeable backing. "My mother had her doubts, but father always told us to stand tall," Korobi says. With eight team members earning national call-ups, "focus remains locked on books and the ball".

Her father, Abdul Mannan, beams with a profound sense of pride rooted in the realities of rural society: "I have no son; my daughters are my world. I want them to fulfil their dreams."

He adds: "They have loved sports since childhood. They always dominated the running races and did well in cricket, too. Now, they have received national team call-ups for handball.

"Every worthy pursuit faces hurdles, and they had theirs."

Ratna Khatun, already bound for the national squad, highlights the pull of the sport over immediate security: "Job offers landed on the table, but keeping the game alive matters most. My father supports this path wholeheartedly."

Her father, Latif Molla, adds softly, capturing the sheer improbability of their ascent within the community: "Hurdles belong to life; pushing past them brings growth. People still pinch themselves in disbelief that a daughter wears the national colours."

A new horizon for Kushtia

Local leaders have taken notice. Engineer Zakir Hossain Sarkar, a district BNP executive committee member, supplies vital support, hinting at plans to invite State Minister for Youth and Sports Aminul Haque for a celebration. District Commissioner Touhid Bin Hasan echoes this, guaranteeing complete administrative backing should they choose sports professionally.

Sporting history is familiar to Durbachara -- boys excel in district cricket, and football prospects climb steadily. Yet handball delivered the gleaming crown of a national championship, its sporting landscape redrawn by village girls who refused to stay on the sidelines.



Scaloni's 'new Argentina project' awaits legendary records

AGENCIES

Lionel Scaloni has already carved his name into Argentina's football history, but the Albiceleste boss is far from finished. With his contract extended until after the 2030 World Cup, the 48-year-old manager is now preparing for another ambitious chapter, one that could see him break some of the most remarkable records in the national team's history.

Argentina Football Association president Claudio Tapia confirmed Scaloni's renewal, ending months of uncertainty over his future following the team's heartbreaking 1-0 defeat to Spain in the 2026 World Cup final on July 19.

"A new project begins now," Scaloni declared, insisting that his enthusiasm remains as strong as it was on his first day in charge.

And this project comes with historic possibilities.

If he remains at the helm until 2030, Scaloni will become the first Argentina coach to lead the national team in three World Cups. Legendary managers Cesar Luis Menotti and Carlos Bilardo each guided Argentina in two editions, winning the trophy in 1978 and 1986 respectively.

Scaloni could also rewrite the record books for the most matches managed by an Argentina coach. Having taken charge of 107 matches since his debut against Guatemala in September 2018, he is just 17 games away from matching Guillermo Stabile's remarkable record of 124 matches, set between 1940 and 1960.

Stabile remains Argentina's most decorated national team coach, having collected seven trophies, including six Copa America titles and one Pan American Championship.

Scaloni, meanwhile, has already delivered an extraordinary collection of silverware. Under his guidance, Argentina won the 2021 and 2024 Copa America titles, the 2022 Finalissima and, most significantly, the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

His transformation of a struggling side into a world-beating unit remains one of the greatest coaching achievements in Argentine football.

However, the next challenge may be his toughest yet. With Lionel Messi having retired from international football after serving as Argentina's talisman for two decades, Scaloni must build a new generation capable of carrying forward the country's winning tradition.

'Complete Nonsense': Cummins rejects Khawaja's allegations

AGENCIES

Australia captain Pat Cummins has vehemently rejected allegations made by former teammate Usman Khawaja in his autobiography about the 2018 ball-tampering scandal in South Africa, describing claims of his involvement as "complete and utter nonsense".

Speaking at a 68-minute press conference in Sydney on Friday, Cummins denied knowing about the plan to use sandpaper on the ball, insisting that the entire team was not aware of the plot. "When he says we all knew, if by that he means that we knew sandpaper was going out in the field, he's 100% wrong. I've said that consistently for the last eight years," Cummins said.

Khawaja, whose autobiography was released this week, alleged that the entire team knew about the plan and claimed that some players had resisted his suggestion to take collective responsibility rather than leaving Steve Smith, David Warner and Cameron Bancroft to face the consequences. Cummins, however, said he could not recall any such discussion or team meeting.





He also strongly rejected Khawaja's suggestion that his skin colour and background had prevented him from becoming Australia's captain, calling it one of the most serious claims in the book.

Taking exception to the allegations, Cummins said: "Usman's a friend, but friends aren't casual with each other's lives and reputations." Although he received legal advice that some remarks could be defamatory, he ruled out taking legal action, saying it was time to move forward after eight years.

The controversy intensified when Warner publicly backed Khawaja, criticising Cummins for his response.

"I still stick by Uzzie and what he has written in that book. That is the truth," Warner said during television commentary ahead of Australia's one-day international against England. He accused Cummins of throwing Khawaja "under the bus" and said he was disappointed with the captain's remarks.

Warner also revealed that the scandal had taken a devastating personal toll, claiming his wife Candice had lost a baby in its aftermath. He maintained that the three players punished for the incident had already paid a heavy price.

In 2018, Smith and Warner received 12-month suspensions from Cricket Australia, while Bancroft was banned for nine months. Smith was also removed as captain.

Former head coach Darren Lehmann and batting coach Graeme Hick have also rejected Khawaja's allegations, while Mitchell Starc reiterated that the bowlers were unaware of sandpaper being taken onto the field. Josh Hazlewood and Nathan Lyon have remained silent on the latest claims.

Cummins acknowledged that Australia's culture at the time had an unhealthy win-at-all-costs mentality, with arrogance towards opponents and umpires. However, he said the environment had improved significantly under his leadership.

Cricket Australia chairman David Boon has ruled out reopening the investigation. Cummins maintained that he had been truthful during the original review and insisted his position had never changed.

"I did get advised this week that some of the things that've been said are probably defamatory, but I won't be doing that," he said, adding that he would not discuss the incident again.





Italy striker Pio Esposito celebrates after netting his second goal in a 3-1 win over France at the San Siro in the UEFA Nations League yesterday. Meanwhile, at Wembley Stadium, England's Harry Kane poses with his children and holds up the Ballon d'Or trophy ahead of their Nations League match against Croatia. PHOTO: AFP/REUTERS

Italy stun France, Spain stay perfect as Kane makes history

AGENCIES

Italy came from behind to beat France 3-1 in Milan, handing Zinedine Zidane his first defeat as France coach, while Spain continued their winning run and Harry Kane inspired England to a Nations League quarterfinal spot on Thursday.

Spain lead Group A3 with 15 points after a 2-0 victory over the Czech Republic in Prague, extending their winning streak in the competition to five matches.

Alex Baena opened the scoring from the penalty spot before Marc Pubill sealed the win with a goal in the dying seconds, as Spain overcame a 10-man Czech side.

The victory also extended Spain's unbeaten run in competitive matches to 44 games. Having already secured their place in the quarterfinals, the defending champions will host England in Madrid on Sunday in their final Group A3 fixture.

In Milan, France, who were without injured forwards Kylian Mbappe and Ousmane Dembele, took the lead in the 10th minute when Michael Olise capitalised on a loose pass from Gianluigi Donnarumma.

Francesco Pio Esposito restored parity by steering home Nicolo Cambiaghi's pass, before France came close to regaining the lead as Bradley Barcola and Rayan Cherki both struck the woodwork.

Italy missed a second-half penalty through Sebastiano Esposito, who blazed his effort over the bar, but Davide Frattesi made amends by powering home Federico Dimarco's cut-back to put the hosts ahead.

Meanwhile, England booked their place in the quarterfinals with a 2-1 win over Croatia at Wembley, as captain Harry Kane marked his record-breaking 126th international appearance with a goal.

Croatia, determined to avoid a repeat of their 7-0 humiliation against England in Rijeka last month, looked far more organised from the outset.

However, goals from Morgan Rogers and Kane, who converted from the penalty spot, secured the victory for Thomas Tuchel's side.

England now have an opportunity to avenge their 3-2 defeat to the world champions in their Nations League opener when they travel to Madrid for Sunday's showdown with Spain.





COP31 turns to negotiations

World leaders wrap up two days of speeches, lay out competing priorities

AGENCIES

World leaders have set out competing positions and made clashing demands in two days of intense speech-making at the COP31 climate change talks in Turkey, leaving negotiators with a tough task to draft a meaningful deal that all can agree.

Small island states, among the most vulnerable in the world as global warming makes sea levels rise, pleaded for urgent cuts to greenhouse gas emissions.

They aim to create a fund backed by a charge on money that islanders receive from abroad to eventually raise around $3 billion a year for projects to make their nations less vulnerable to climate change.

"We decided that there had to be a way that we can guarantee more reliable sources of funding for the islands," Antigua and Barbuda's UN ambassador Walton Webson said. "We cannot rely solely on development assistance again."

Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg said on the sidelines of the UN conference: "The situation could not be less under control. The planet is not dying. It is being killed. It is being killed by the very same people often thought to come to our rescue. No one is coming to our rescue."

SEE PAGE 5 COL 4



A Trojan Horse installation by Greenpeace International and Danish artist Thomas Dambo, aimed at drawing attention to the fossil fuel industry's expansion into plastics, stands in the city centre during the UN climate conference COP31 in Antalya, Turkey, yesterday.

PHOTO: **REUTERS**

Give wage board time, return to work

RMG union leaders urge workers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With labour unrest brewing again in major industrial zones, union leaders in the textile and garment sector yesterday urged agitating workers to return to their workstations while the minimum wage board works to fix their monthly pay scale.

At a joint press conference, leaders of five alliances of different federations of unions urged the garment workers to shun street agitations.

IndustriAll Bangladesh Council President Mir Abul Kalam Azad also urged factory owners to resume production and not shut their units under Section 13(1) of the Bangladesh Labour Act, which stipulates 'no work, no pay'.

"Shutting the factories is no solution; rather, this will increase uncertainty and unrest among workers," he said, calling on workers to be

SEE PAGE 5 COL 4

UP poll ambition suspected in BNP leader's murder

Police also probing business disputes; no case filed or arrests made yet

DIPANKAR ROY, *Khulna*

A day after BNP leader and sand trader Jakir Hossain was shot dead in Khulna's Rupsha upazila, police had neither recorded a case nor made any arrests as of yesterday.

Investigators are giving priority to the possibility that his plan to contest the upcoming union parishad election as a chairman candidate led to the killing. They are also looking into possible business disputes.

Jakir, 43, was shot in a shop in Swalpabahirdia village around 10:30pm on Thursday.



Jakir Hossain

A resident of Khajadanga village under TSB Union, he was also a member of the union BNP's search committee, formed as part of the party's organisational restructuring.

Khulna Superintendent of Police Sarker Omar Faroque said investigators were examining whether Jakir had any disputes related to his business.

"He also wanted to contest the upcoming union parishad election. That could also be a reason behind the killing," he said.

Police were working to establish the motive and identify those responsible, he added.

Jakir's brother, Abu Sayeed Sheikh, also suspected electoral rivalry behind the killing.

"We suspect that someone who considered him a political rival might have been involved in the killing," he told The Daily Star.

His wife, Nasrin Begum, said Jakir, who left behind three children, had disputes with several people.

"Just a day before the killing, he had an altercation with a local individual who is a member of a search committee over the purchase of bricks for a school," she said.

A local resident, requesting anonymity, alleged that Jakir had played a role in the arrest of several Awami League leaders and activists by the administration, which might have created hostility towards him.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

Microsoft battles major outage

Rules out 'malicious' activity; Outlook, Teams, Copilot hit worldwide

REUTERS

Microsoft's Outlook, Teams and Copilot were still down yesterday as one of the company's worst outages stretched beyond 12 hours, disrupting communications for businesses and governments worldwide.

Microsoft blamed server problems for the outage and said it was not aware of any malicious activity. It said in its latest update yesterday that it was seeing signs of stabilization after implementing fixes more broadly to attain a persistent recovery of services.

The disruption hit government agencies in Australia, Japan, and the United States, and caused disruptions at trading firms, delays to companies publishing their results and airlines warning customers of delayed communication.



In Europe, stock exchange operator Euronext said its listing teams were experiencing email communication issues, while Britain's insurer Aviva said it was putting backup plans in place for its earnings calls. Danish shipping company Maersk warned customers of delays to emails and updates.

US AI companies OpenAI and Anthropic said they had faced issues with Microsoft connectors, while Indian airlines IndiGo, Akasa Air and Air India said their email

SEE PAGE 5 COL 4

No respite from dengue as winter approaches

At least **64** deaths, **23,880** hospitalisations in Nov so far



HELEMUL ALAM

At least 64 people died of dengue and 23,880 others were hospitalised in the first 13 days of November, as the outbreak continues to take a heavy toll towards the end of the year.

Experts warn that the situation could remain severe throughout November, with December likely to see more cases than in previous years.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), dengue claimed 174 lives in October, 148 in September, 43 in August, 36 in July and 13 in June.

Hospitalisations stood at around 53,000 in October, 43,774 in September, 20,536 in August, 9,206 in July and 2,907 in June.

Prof Kabirul Bashar of Jahangirnagar University's Department of Zoology said the outbreak might not subside as quickly as previously expected, particularly due to recent rainfall, including rain two days ago.

Based on current trends, the decline in dengue cases during November could be smaller than initially anticipated, he said.

Bashar, an entomologist, stressed the need to eliminate mosquito breeding grounds, warning that rainfall could create new breeding sites wherever water accumulates.

He recommended applying larvicide where stagnant water could not be removed and regularly monitoring potential breeding sites to control the Aedes mosquito population.

Outbreak may remain severe throughout Nov • Dec cases could exceed previous years • Recent rainfall creating fresh mosquito breeding grounds • Experts urge stronger mosquito control, early hospitalisation

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1



On a Friday afternoon, when Motijheel's usually busy streets take a break from the weekday rush, a group of young men turn a stretch of road into their own cricket ground. With wickets, bats and boundless enthusiasm, they enjoy a game in the heart of Dhaka's commercial hub.

PHOTO: **MEHEDI HASAN**

NEWS IN FOCUS

Veggie prices rise after weeks of relief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Despite the onset of winter, prices of several vegetables, including country beans, bottle gourd, pointed gourd, potatoes and tomatoes, have risen in Dhaka's kitchen markets.

Meanwhile, prices of broiler and Sonali chicken and green chillies fell over the past week, while fish, meat, eggs and other essentials remained unchanged.

Visits to kitchen markets in Shewrapara, Kazipara, Ibrahimpur and Karwan Bazar yesterday revealed the mixed trend.

Mustafa Kamal, a retailer at Shewrapara kitchen market who sources produce from the Mirpur-1 wholesale hub, said prices of several vegetables had risen over the past couple of days after remaining low for weeks.

Country beans rose from Tk 50-60 to Tk 60-70 per kg, pointed gourd from Tk 30-40 to Tk 50, pumpkin from Tk 30-35 to Tk 40, and bottle gourd from Tk 30-40 to Tk 60 apiece.

Prices of green tomatoes, new potatoes and papaya also increased, he said.

Jamal Hossain, a wholesaler at Karwan Bazar, attributed the increases to a slight drop in supply. He also said the US dollar had strengthened against the taka last week, raising the prices of imported vegetables.



New potatoes were selling at Tk 100-120 per kg, up from Tk 90-100 last week, while ripe tomatoes rose from Tk 110-130 to Tk 120-140.

Old potatoes remained at Tk 20-30, onions at Tk 40-50 and brinjal at Tk 40-60 per kg.

Green chillies, however, fell to Tk 50-60 per kg at Karwan Bazar and Tk 80-

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WEEKEND READ

DHAKA SATURDAY NOVEMBER 14, 2026, KARTIK 29, 1433 BS

The Daily Star



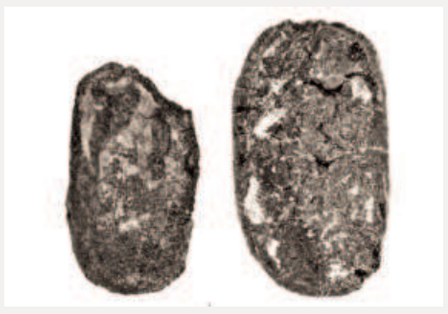
Raghurampura in Vikrampura, Munshiganj, an early Medieval Buddhist monastery complex

The history of Bengal WRITTEN IN GRAINS OF RICE

Ancient seeds, plant remains reveal how people lived, farmed and traded thousands of years ago



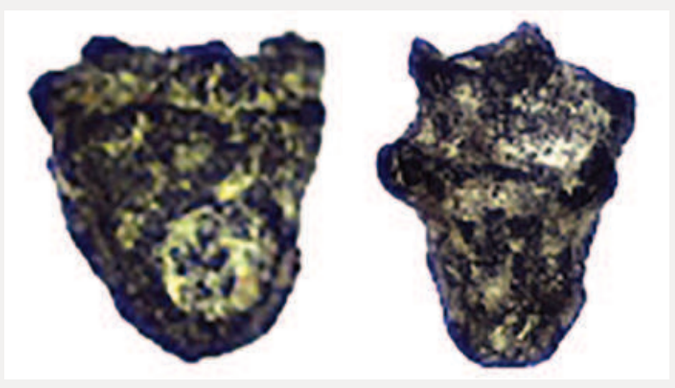
Wari-Bateshwar in Narsingdi, an archaeological site which dates back to Early Historic period



Rice bean remnants from Vikrampura site

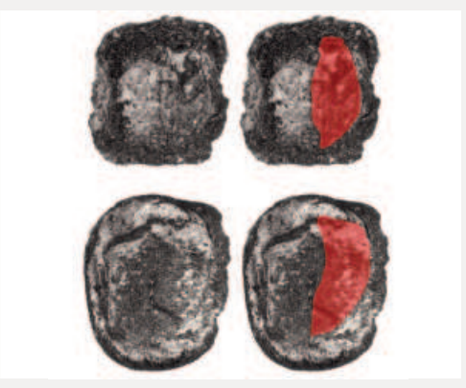


Rice grain remnants recovered from the sites



Rice spikelet bases

PHOTOS: **PROF DR MIZANUR RAHMAN**



Remnants of pulses recovered from the sites

SAKIB AHMED

The history of the Indian subcontinent has largely been told through what its rulers left behind: inscriptions carved in stone, punch-marked coins, royal decrees, and accounts of wars, taxes and temples.

These records tell us much about kings and kingdoms, but remarkably little about the people who sustained them.

What did an ordinary farmer in the Bengal delta eat for lunch 2,500 years ago? What crops did farming families grow while coping with seasonal floods? What did they wear, and how did they organise their daily lives?

Much of what we know about the region's past offers few answers. Throughout the prehistoric and early historic periods, ordinary people left behind almost no written accounts of their lives.

Yet traces of their existence survive beneath the soil: charred rice grains, discarded seeds, fragments of cotton and remains of plants that once grew alongside their crops.

Through archaeobotany, the study of ancient plant remains recovered from archaeological sites, these seemingly insignificant fragments are helping researchers piece together a history that conventional records have largely overlooked.

By examining carbonised seeds, grains and other botanical material, archaeologists are beginning to reconstruct how people lived, farmed and sustained their communities thousands of years ago.

For Bangladesh, shaped by the shifting rivers and fertile floodplains of the world's largest active delta, these discoveries hold particular significance.

"This land is not a static or once-created landmass; rather, it is a living, shifting landscape formed through a continuous process of erosion, transport and deposition that began around 10,000 years ago," said Prof Dr Mizanur Rahman of the archaeology department at Jahangirnagar University, also a research associate at the University of Oxford.

For years, archaeologists assumed that the constantly changing landscape, heavy rainfall, seasonal flooding and biological activity made preserving delicate plant remains particularly difficult.

Recent research, however, is challenging that assumption.

In a collaborative study published in Archaeological and Anthropological Sciences, researchers, including Prof Rahman, used a technique known as bucket flotation to recover ancient botanical remains from two archaeological sites: Wari-Bateshwar in Narsingdi, dating to the Early Historic period, and Raghurampura in Vikrampura, Munshiganj, an Early Medieval Buddhist monastery complex.

Using water to separate organic remains from excavated soil, the researchers recovered thousands of carbonised botanical specimens, offering a rare glimpse into the agricultural foundations of the region's early settlements.

The findings also demonstrated that systematic archaeobotanical investigation is possible in Bangladesh.

The discoveries invite us to imagine an ordinary household in ancient Bengal, where a meal might have consisted of rice and pulses, cooked with mustard or sesame oil.

Although the scene is imagined, archaeological evidence offers clues to what people grew and consumed.

Rice (Oryza sativa) was central to the diet. Analysis of rice spikelet bases showed that around 83.4 percent of the recovered remains belonged to domesticated rice, while another 12.6 percent represented wild or weedy rice types associated with ancient cultivation.

Researchers also identified 14 pulse species, including mung bean (Vigna radiata), black gram (Vigna mungo), moth bean (Vigna aconitifolia) and horse gram (Macrotyloma uniflorum), which provided plant-based protein.

This land is not a static or once-created landmass; rather, it is a living, shifting landscape formed through a continuous process of erosion, transport and deposition that began around 10,000 years ago.

Prof Dr Mizanur Rahman
Archaeology department at JU

Remains of mustard (Brassica juncea) and sesame (Sesamum indicum) suggest that oil-producing plants were also part of the agricultural landscape.

"Together, the findings suggest that ancient Bengal's food economy was more diverse than a reliance on rice alone. The combination of cereals, pulses and oilseeds points to a varied agricultural system that sustained communities beyond their most basic dietary needs," Prof Rahman said.

The discoveries also shed light on the economic foundations of early settlements.

"Ancient hubs such as Wari-Bateshwar were part of a sophisticated network closely tied to the region's broader socio-economic fabric. Through archaeological excavations, we are uncovering not just artefacts, but the economic and ecological foundations that allowed these early urban societies to thrive," he noted.

Wari-Bateshwar, known for its fortified settlement, ancient roads, silver punch-marked coins and semi-precious stone beads, has often been studied for its urban development and trade connections.

But behind those signs of prosperity lay another story, that of the farmers whose labour sustained the settlement.

A single grain of rice may seem insignificant. Yet before reaching a cooking pot, it passed through several stages of labour: cultivation, harvesting, threshing, winnowing and cleaning. Each demanded time, skill and knowledge.

At Wari-Bateshwar, recovered rice spikelet bases, chaff fragments and weed seeds provide evidence not only of cultivation but also of how crops were processed after harvest.

The weed seeds offer further clues to how farmers adapted to the delta's fluctuating water levels.

Among the specimens was Acmella paniculata, a plant documented in Thailand as a companion weed in rainfed rice cultivation.

"Its presence in the Bangladeshi archaeological record is significant, as it has not been reported from ancient Indian archaeological sites. The finding raises the possibility that farmers in the delta used cultivation methods that differed from those practised elsewhere in the subcontinent," Prof Rahman said.

These seemingly insignificant fragments are helping researchers piece together a history that conventional records have largely overlooked. By examining carbonised seeds, grains and other botanical material, archaeologists are beginning to reconstruct how people lived, farmed and sustained their communities thousands of years ago.

According to him, the discovery could indicate a farming practice known as "decrue agriculture", in which seeds are planted on floodplains as water recedes, allowing crops to grow using the moisture left behind.

Rice cultivation also reshaped the relationship between people and their environment.

"Wetland rice cultivation tied human life permanently to Bengal's fertile soil. Since aquatic rice yields nearly double that of dry rice, it was not just about scattering seeds but demanded organised, continuous labour for land management and preparation, water management, bunding and weeding. This necessity became one of the most powerful drivers of population concentration, community organisation and the development of socio-political life in the delta," Prof Rahman explained.

The history of these settlements, therefore, lies not only in their buildings and artefacts, but also in the fields and farming practices that made permanent communities possible.

The botanical remains offer clues beyond food production, revealing aspects of clothing and connections with distant regions.

Fragments of cotton seeds and capsules, identified as Gossypium arboreum, accounted for around 42 percent of the botanical finds at Vikrampura and 16 percent at Wari-Bateshwar.

"These remains point to cotton cultivation, processing and local textile production at both sites, an economics aspect often difficult to trace through conventional archaeological evidence," Prof Rahman said.

Perhaps more intriguing is what the remains reveal about the movement of crops across geographical boundaries.

By examining the length-to-width ratios of mature, carbonised rice grains, researchers found that rice from Wari-Bateshwar fell predominantly within the japonica subspecies range, characterised by shorter, rounder grains than the long-grained indica varieties commonly associated with the Indian subcontinent.

These findings resemble rice recovered from prehistoric and early historic sites in Thailand, including Ban Non Wat and Khao Sam Kaeo, as well as sites in Myanmar.

The similarities raise questions about the movement of crops, agricultural knowledge and farming traditions between Bengal and Southeast Asia.

Evidence from Vikrampura points to another connection. Researchers identified remains of rice bean (Vigna umbellata), a crop domesticated in mainland Southeast Asia.

According to Prof Rahman, this is the first archaeological record of rice bean in South Asia, offering further evidence of agricultural exchanges between Bengal and Southeast Asia long before such connections appeared in written accounts.

The discoveries challenge the notion of ancient Bengal as an isolated agricultural region, suggesting that its farming traditions were shaped not only by the local environment but potentially by wider networks of exchange across Asia.

Beyond reconstructing ancient diets, farming practices and trade connections, archaeobotany offers a window into how communities responded to changing rivers, floods and climatic conditions.

For a region whose landscape continues to be shaped by water, those lessons remain relevant.

"Understanding how ancient societies adapted their agricultural practices to these environmental challenges offers vital perspectives for our own future in a changing climate," Prof Rahman said.

Despite the promise of such research, he said the lack of well-equipped laboratories and inadequate funding remained major obstacles to advancing archaeobotany in Bangladesh.

RETHINKING CHILD RIGHTS AND PARENTAL EQUALITY

When a mother has custody but not guardianship

DILRUBA SHORMIN

A mother wants to take her child abroad for urgent medical treatment. The doctors have advised that the treatment should not be delayed. She has raised the child, paid for the child's education and healthcare, and shouldered almost every responsibility since her divorce. Yet she cannot proceed because the father, who has been largely absent from the child's life, refuses to provide a no-objection certificate (NOC).

In another case, a university teacher receives an opportunity to pursue higher education abroad and hopes to take her daughter with her. The father refuses consent. After prolonged negotiations, he agrees—but only after the mother signs an agreement on non-judicial stamp paper, undertaking to arrange a visa for him after reaching the destination country. The mother's academic future and the child's opportunity are thus made conditional on the father's consent.

These are not isolated accounts. They expose a structural problem in Bangladesh's laws governing child custody and guardianship. The problem affects mothers, children and, in certain circumstances, fathers as well. It raises a fundamental question: why should a child's healthcare, education, mobility and future depend on the consent of a parent who may have little involvement in the child's upbringing?

A child is born from the union of two parents. Their marriage may end, their personalities may differ and their lives may take separate directions. But the child should not become a casualty of their disagreement. The law must protect the child's interests—not preserve one parent's authority at the expense of the other.

CUSTODY AND GUARDIANSHIP: THE UNEQUAL BURDEN OF PARENTHOOD

Custody generally concerns the child's physical care, residence and day-to-day upbringing. Guardianship, by contrast, involves legal authority over important aspects of a child's life, including education, property and certain major decisions. A mother may therefore have custody without possessing equivalent legal authority as a guardian.

Under traditional Muslim personal law, a mother is generally entitled to preferential custody (hizanat) of young children, subject to established conditions. Under the Hanafi school, the conventional rule allows a mother to retain custody of a son until the age of seven and a daughter until puberty. However, courts increasingly consider the child's welfare when applying these traditional custody rules.

The more persistent inequality lies in the distinction between custody and legal guardianship. The father is generally recognised as the natural or legal guardian, even when the mother performs most of the actual caregiving. A mother's remarriage may also be treated under traditional personal law as grounds for losing preferential custody, although it should not be understood as an automatic or conclusive bar where the child's welfare points in another direction.

This arrangement creates an unequal burden of parenthood. Mothers are frequently expected to provide care, sacrifice professional opportunities and take responsibility for their children's everyday needs, while fathers retain a superior legal position in important decisions. Even a mother who has not remarried and has been the child's principal caregiver may encounter serious difficulties in obtaining independent guardianship while the father is alive and not legally considered unfit.

This is not an argument that every mother is necessarily a suitable caregiver or that every father is unsuitable. Neither parent should receive automatic preference simply because of gender. The central question should be whether a particular parent can best protect the child's physical, emotional, educational and psychological wellbeing. A legal system that presumes superiority or incapacity on the basis of motherhood or fatherhood risks overlooking the actual circumstances of the child.

AN OUTDATED LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND AN UNRESOLVED CONTRADICTION

Bangladesh's principal statute governing guardianship is the Guardians and Wards Act 1890, a colonial-era law that is more than 130 years old. Section 7 provides for the appointment or declaration of a guardian, while Section 17 identifies factors relevant to the welfare of a minor. Section 19(b), however, restricts the appointment of another person as guardian when the father is alive and is not considered unfit.

This provision creates a serious difficulty. Although the Act recognises the welfare of the child as a central consideration, the father's status may prevent the court from appointing the mother as guardian unless the statutory condition is satisfied. The result is a tension between the welfare principle and the traditional preference for paternal guardianship.

The Family Courts Act 2023 gives family courts jurisdiction over disputes involving guardianship and custody. However, the Act operates within the wider framework of personal laws. Bangladesh does not have a uniform civil code governing family matters. Different religious communities remain subject to different personal law rules, and the practical legal position of children may therefore vary according to the religion of their parents.

The question is not whether a court should always appoint the mother. It should not. The question is why the law should make the father's authority the starting presumption and require the mother to overcome additional legal barriers. Both parents should be assessed by the same standards, with the child's best interests as the paramount consideration.



A mother plays cricket with her son at a practice facility. Despite shouldering much of the responsibility for raising children, mothers in Bangladesh do not enjoy equal legal guardianship rights with fathers.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



The welfare and best interests of children must remain at the heart of every decision concerning custody and guardianship, with both parents assessed on equal terms.

AI-GENERATED ILLUSTRATION.

This is not to suggest that people belonging to other religious communities face no difficulties. They do. Hindu, Christian and other families may encounter their own problems concerning custody, guardianship and the management of children's property. The difficulty is that the existing legal framework does not provide a single, comprehensive and clearly articulated child-centred standard that operates equally across religious communities.

The problem becomes even more complicated in interfaith marriages. When parents belong to different religious communities, questions concerning custody, guardianship, inheritance and the management of a child's property may become legally complex. A child's rights should not become uncertain because the parents belong to different faiths.

A 2024 assessment by UN Women, Achieving Equality Before the Law in Bangladesh, identifies these shortcomings. It recommends amending Section 19 of the Guardians and Wards Act to recognise mothers alongside fathers as competent guardians, clarifying the distinction between custody and guardianship, and replacing the existing law with comprehensive secular legislation.

WHAT THE COURTS HAVE RECOGNISED AND WHAT REMAINS UNRESOLVED

Bangladesh's judiciary has made important interventions. In January 2023, the High Court Division recognised that educational institutions and relevant authorities should accept the name of either parent or a legal guardian in official educational documents. The decision addressed the discriminatory practice of requiring a father's name even where a child was being raised by the mother alone.

In April 2024, the High Court Division granted guardianship of a child to her mother, actress Azmeri Haque Badhon, and raised questions about the constitutional validity of Section 19(b) of the Guardians and Wards Act. These developments indicate that the traditional framework is not beyond judicial reconsideration.

A more recent decision illustrates the continuing contradiction. In Family Suit № 313 of 2025, decided by Family Court № 7, Dhaka, on 25 February 2026, the court declined to appoint the mother as legal guardian of her minor son because the father was alive and was not considered legally disqualified. Nevertheless, considering the child's welfare, the court appointed the mother as custodian after the child had passed the age of seven and until he attained majority. The father was directed to bear educational and medical expenses and pay Tk 15,000 per month in maintenance.

The decision recognises the mother's caregiving role but also exposes the central problem: custody and guardianship remain separate. The mother may be entrusted with the child's everyday life, yet the father retains the legal authority that can determine whether the child receives a passport, travels abroad or accesses certain opportunities.

The question is not whether a court should always appoint the mother. It should not. The question is why the law should make the father's authority the starting presumption and require the mother to overcome additional legal barriers. Both parents should be assessed by the same standards, with the child's best interests as the paramount consideration.



A teacher gives lessons to children at a daycare centre in Dhaka's Khilgaon, run by the Department of Women Affairs. Bangladesh needs stronger alternative care arrangements for children without adequate parental care.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

WHAT NEIGHBOURING COURTS HAVE RECOGNISED

Judicial decisions in neighbouring countries demonstrate that traditional assumptions can be reconsidered without automatically privileging either parent.

In Pakistan, the Supreme Court, in Raja Muhammad Owais v. Mst. Nazia Jabeen and others (Civil Petition No. 240 of 2021, decided on 5 October 2022; reported as 2022 SCMR 2123), rejected the proposition that a mother's remarriage should, by itself, disqualify her from custody. The Court emphasised that the welfare of the children, including their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing, must remain the paramount consideration. The judgment is significant because it shows that even within a Muslim personal law framework, traditional rules concerning maternal custody need not be applied mechanically at the expense of children.

In India, the Supreme Court's decision in Githa Hariharan v. Reserve Bank of India (1999) addressed the interpretation of the expression "after the father" in the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act. The Court interpreted it to mean "in the absence of the father", rather than only after his death. It recognised that a father's absence could include circumstances in which he was indifferent, inaccessible or unable to act, thereby allowing a mother to exercise guardianship during his lifetime in appropriate situations.

Another important decision, ABC v. State (NCT of Delhi) (2015), concerned an unmarried Christian mother who had raised her child without the father's involvement. The Supreme Court held that the child's welfare was decisive and that the mother's guardianship application should not be rejected merely because she could not disclose or notify the putative father in the circumstances of that case.

These judgments do not establish that mothers should always prevail over fathers. Their broader significance is that parental rights must be assessed in relation to the child's actual needs and circumstances. A parent's absence, indifference, caregiving history and capacity to provide a stable environment cannot be ignored in determining what is best for a child. Bangladesh can draw valuable lessons from this child-centred judicial approach.

THE CHILD'S BEST INTERESTS MUST BE THE GOVERNING PRINCIPLE

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provides a clear international framework for protecting children's interests. Article 3 establishes that the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children. Article 12 recognises the child's right to express views in matters affecting them, with due weight given to their age and maturity. Article 18 emphasises the common responsibilities of both parents in raising and developing their children.

Bangladesh was among the early signatories to the Convention, signing it on 26 January 1990, the day it was opened for signature, and ratifying it on 3 August 1990. This early commitment carries a responsibility to ensure that domestic laws and institutions give practical effect to the principles of child protection, equality and the best interests of the child.

The constitutional principles of equality and non-discrimination also reinforce this responsibility. Articles 27 and 28 of the Constitution guarantee equality before the law and prohibit discrimination on specified grounds. Article 28(2) expressly recognises equal rights for women and men in all spheres of state and public life. Although the application of these provisions to personal law questions may involve complex legal considerations, they provide an important normative basis for reconsidering legal arrangements that systematically diminish a mother's capacity to protect her child.

The best interests of the child should not remain a phrase invoked only in court judgments. This principle must guide legislation, judicial decisions and administrative procedures. Courts should be able to examine the actual caregiving history, living conditions, behaviour, emotional relationships and parenting capacity of both parents. The child's views should also be heard in an appropriate manner, taking account of age and maturity. Where necessary and appropriate, a judge should have the opportunity to interact with the child independently, rather than relying exclusively on competing claims made by the parents.

CHILDREN WITHOUT PARENTAL CARE: WHERE DOES THE RESPONSIBILITY LIE?

The problem extends beyond divorced families. What happens when a mother dies, a father dies, both parents are absent, or neither is capable of providing proper care? What happens to children whose parents are missing, incapacitated, abusive or unable to protect them?

Bangladesh's Children Act 2013 recognises the need for alternative care. Sections 84–88 provide for arrangements that may include reintegration with parents or extended family, community-based care and institutional care. Therefore, it would be inaccurate to say that Bangladesh has no legal provision for alternative care. However, the country needs a more developed and accessible system of family-based foster care, professional assessment, monitoring and long-term support for children who cannot safely remain with their biological parents.

International experience offers useful models. Several European and North American countries have established foster care systems through which children can receive temporary or long-term family-based care under state supervision. In Muslim-majority societies, kafalah provides another relevant model. It allows an individual or family to assume responsibility for a child's care, education and protection without necessarily creating the same legal relationship as full adoption. UNICEF recognises kafalah as an important alternative care mechanism under the international child protection framework. Some Muslim-majority countries, including Tunisia, Indonesia, Malaysia and Turkey, also permit forms of legal adoption under their respective national laws.

Bangladesh should strengthen its own alternative care framework in a manner consistent with constitutional guarantees, child protection standards and the country's social and religious context. A child who loses one or both parents should not be left vulnerable to disputes over property, compensation or legal representation. The state must ensure that a suitable caregiver can be appointed and that the child's financial interests are independently protected.

A COMMON, RELIGION-NEUTRAL LAW IS NECESSARY

The solution is not necessarily to abolish religious personal laws or to interfere unnecessarily in matters of religious practice. Religious communities may continue to follow their respective personal laws in appropriate areas of family life. However, the state must have an independent legal framework to protect every child's welfare.

A common, religion-neutral law on child custody and guardianship should allow any mother or father, irrespective of religion, ethnicity, gender or social background, to approach a court seeking custody or guardianship on the basis of the child's best interests. The right to seek judicial protection should not depend on whether a parent belongs to a particular religious community or satisfies a gender-based presumption.

These experiences and needs have given rise to an initiative called the 'Children's Guardianship Expansion Proposition (CGEP)', involving parents, lawyers, child welfare activists, policymakers, religious scholars, journalists and civil society members. The central idea of the initiative is to expand access to guardianship while placing the child's welfare at the centre of legal decision-making. Religious personal laws need not disappear; rather, a common state law should ensure that no parent is prevented from seeking an appropriate judicial remedy simply because of their gender or religious identity.

Such a law must also give courts sufficient discretion to decide cases on the basis of evidence and actual circumstances. Judges should be able to assess the conduct and capacity of both parents, the child's relationship with each, the continuity of care, the child's own views and any risks to their wellbeing. The courts' hands should not be tied by outdated statutory restrictions or automatic parental preferences.

This does not mean giving judges unlimited or unstructured power. Their decisions should be guided by clear statutory criteria, reasoned findings and safeguards against arbitrary or discriminatory treatment.

Administrative procedures must also be reconsidered. Where a mother or father has lawful authority to make a decision concerning a child, unnecessary consent requirements from an uninvolved or obstructive parent should not prevent access to education, healthcare or other essential opportunities. Where the consent of both parents is genuinely necessary, there should be a fair and time-bound process for resolving disagreements, with the child's welfare as the overriding consideration.

The law exists to serve human beings; human beings do not exist to serve the law. A legal framework written in 1890 cannot be allowed to determine the opportunities and dignity of children and parents in a society that has changed so profoundly. Bangladesh needs a modern, humane and religion-neutral guardianship law—one that recognises both parents, protects every child and places the child's best interests above inherited legal privilege. A child is the shared responsibility of two parents, but the child's future belongs to the child. It is the duty of the law and the state to protect that future.

Dilruba Shormin *is an advocate, human rights activist and expert on Muslim law. She is the convenor of the Children's Guardianship Expansion Proposition (CGEP).*

Reclaiming religious authority

What Bangladesh can learn from Indonesia's women ulama movement

In 2017, the inaugural Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI), or Indonesian Women Ulama Congress, brought together Islamic scholars and activists to challenge male-dominated religious authority and advance women's rights. Drawing on Islamic texts, human rights principles and women's lived experiences, the movement developed a new approach to religious interpretation, issuing landmark fatwas against child marriage and gender-based violence. Ruby Kholifah, a leading Indonesian human rights advocate, executive director of the Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN) Indonesia and member of KUPI's steering committee, speaks to The Daily Star about the movement's emergence, its role in raising Indonesia's legal marriage age for girls from 16 to 19, and its efforts to reclaim religious authority. She also explores how Indonesia's religious, cultural and institutional traditions enabled the movement to flourish, and what Bangladesh and other South Asian countries can learn from its experience.



Schoolgirls applaud during a classroom gathering in Bangladesh. Despite the legal minimum marriage age of 18 for girls, child marriage remains a persistent challenge, threatening their education, well-being and future opportunities. PHOTO: **STAR**



Ruby Kholifah, a leading Indonesian human rights advocate, executive director of the Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN) Indonesia and member of KUPI's steering committee. PHOTO: **COURTESY**

The Daily Star (TDS) : How did KUPI emerge as a collective movement in 2017, and how did Indonesia's distinctive history of women's activism, religious traditions and institutional landscape shape its approach?

Ruby Kholifah (RK): The roots go back long before 2017. Indonesia has a rich history of women's activism. At the first Indonesian Women's Congress in 1928, Indonesian mothers and activists were already discussing child marriage, polygamy, political participation and social welfare.

Crucially, in Indonesia's history, the feminist movement and faith-based groups have rarely been in opposition. Indonesian feminists realised early on that there is a structural reality: they cannot influence conservative or grassroots communities without actively engaging religious leaders. In our context, discussions on democracy, human rights and social justice have always intersected with religion. Since the 1980s, an extensive body of literature has been published on topics like Islam and Democracy, Islam and Human Rights and Women's Rights in Islam.

Before 2017, however, people worked in isolation: some focused on academic publishing and journal writing; some conducted critical Islamic studies workshops directly with religious leaders. Others worked with youth in Islamic boarding schools. Many engaged with Majlis Talim—grassroots religious gatherings led by women, which draw anywhere from a hundred to thousands of women. In progressive Majlis Talim, these circles are not one-way lectures; they are interactive spaces where women ask critical questions about their daily lives and faith.

What changed in 2017 was the realisation that working in isolation was ineffective against systemic patriarchy, which continuously eroded progressive interpretations. Activists and scholars came together to reclaim religious authority.

Why "reclaim"? Because our female scholars firmly believe that Islam protects and respects women's rights. Yet in practice, multiple interpretations exist—ranging from conservative to progressive. Because Indonesia is not an Islamic state and has never imposed a single official tafsir (exegesis), citizens enjoy the freedom to learn from diverse schools of thought. While the state takes a strict stance against violent extremism and terrorism, conservative views remain widespread. Recognising this diversity of interpretations, we knew we had to unite to assert a progressive, women-centred authority over religious texts.

This movement also needs to be understood within Indonesia's distinctive historical, cultural and religious context, which has shaped both its emergence and its approach to religious interpretation.

Islam arrived in Southeast Asia through a process of acculturation, embedding itself naturally into local customs. As a result, many life-cycle rituals surrounding birth, marriage and death share cultural similarities across Muslim, Hindu and indigenous traditions, even though the religious prayers differ. This creates a foundation of cultural safety and tolerance.

Furthermore, Indonesia has two massive Islamic mass organisations: Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), which has approximately 50 million members, and Muhammadiyah, with roughly 25 million members. Both organisations extend down to the village level, operate independently of the state and actively promote religious moderation.

Another vital modality is the Islamic boarding school system. Islamic boarding schools are the primary incubators for religious scholarship in Indonesia. Boys and girls study classical texts here before progressing to public schools, madrasas or State Islamic Universities (UIN) for undergraduate, master's and doctoral degrees.

Crucially, the Islamic boarding school tradition does not rely on a single reference text. Students are taught to compare different interpretations and debate textual references under one roof.

So, there are many modalities, and such an environment fosters critical thinking and intellectual openness, creating the ideal ecosystem for a movement like KUPI to take root. This is one reason why we explore applying it to other countries. It is almost impossible without the necessary modalities, and that is why we are interested in helping people identify their own modalities rather than simply copying what Indonesia has.

Working in isolation for many years proved ineffective. But when we came together in 2017 to launch the first Indonesian Women Ulama Congress (KUPI), we immediately realised the power of our collective impact.

The scholars brought a clear, grounded understanding of women-friendly religious interpretations. They developed an accessible methodology that young scholars could easily learn and apply, documenting it in both print and digital formats for quick dissemination.

To amplify these progressive perspectives online, we established platforms like Mubadala.id, which publishes women's theological insights and their responses to contemporary public issues. It quickly grew into an essential resource for other online platforms and mainstream media seeking authoritative perspectives on women's rights in Islam. Today, media outlets across Indonesia frequently draw on Mubadala.id when covering major social debates—such as in 2017, when KUPI issued its landmark first fatwa declaring the prevention of child marriage an obligation for everyone.

TDS: How is the KUPI movement organised, and what roles do its different member organisations play?

RK: When talking about KUPI (Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia) as a movement, it is essential to emphasise that it belongs to many organisations. It is a collective network comprising over a hundred organisations across the country. AMAN Indonesia serves as part of a five-member steering committee supporting the implementation of the fatwas—or religious deliberations—issued during the congress. The following five core organisations work together to promote and implement KUPI's religious rulings:

Fahmina and Rahima: Focus on strengthening progressive religious perspectives among young ulama, both male and female. Their priority is generational renewal, ensuring that a new cohort of young scholars takes over the work being done by senior scholars, most of whom are over 50.

GUSDURian: Led by the daughter of former Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid ("Gus Dur"), this group expands KUPI's methodology into broader faith communities. A core innovation of KUPI is placing women's lived experiences at the centre of religious interpretation, and GUSDURian helps adapt this approach across diverse faith traditions.

Alimat: Works directly with higher education institutions, engaging universities to transform Islamic studies curricula and introduce KUPI's methodological framework to students and academics.

AMAN Indonesia: My organisation connects KUPI with the international community, allowing global actors to learn from the Indonesian context while facilitating dialogue in other countries to explore how women ulama movements might emerge elsewhere. So when I share this story, it is the story of a broad collective working hand in hand.

TDS: How does KUPI's approach to addressing child marriage differ from that of traditional Islamic institutions?

RK: Preventing child marriage is essential because it safeguards the futures of so many young girls, who suffer deeply from the negative consequences of marrying at a very early age. The women ulama believe that listening directly to the stories of female victims and survivors of gender-based violence provides a vital foundation for issuing victim-friendly fatwas.

This approach marks a major departure from other Islamic institutions, such as traditional Muslim councils. Typically, those institutions issue fatwas solely through textual analysis—compiling theoretical arguments for and against child marriage, which inevitably bogs the question down in endless debates among Islamic thinkers.

KUPI introduced three foundational pillars for tafsir (interpretation):

1. Islamic sacred texts: The Qur'an and Hadith.
2. International human rights standards: Specifically CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), which KUPI scholars view as fully compatible with Islamic principles of justice and inclusion.
3. Women's lived experiences: Consulting directly with women who are victims and survivors of gender-based violence and child marriage.

When KUPI consulted survivors of child marriage, the devastating real-world harm—physical, psychological and socio-economic—became indisputable. KUPI scholars asked: Why are we debating abstract texts when the harm to real human lives is so clear? Why not stand beside the victim and issue a ruling that protects life?

Consequently, in 2017, KUPI issued a landmark fatwa declaring that preventing child marriage is obligatory for everyone. The logic was clear: preventing child marriage saves young girls' futures from systemic harm.

To disseminate these insights, KUPI utilises digital platforms like Mubadala.id, an online media platform dedicated to promoting progressive Islamic scholarship on women's rights.



Women religious scholars gather at the Indonesian Women Ulama Congress (KUPI). Launched in 2017, the movement challenges male-dominated religious authority and promotes women's rights through progressive interpretations of Islamic texts. PHOTO: **COLLECTED**

TDS: How did KUPI's intervention contribute to Indonesia's decision to raise the legal marriage age for girls from 16 to 19 in 2019, and what challenges remain?

RK: Female ulama in Indonesia do not sit isolated in corners; they are university professors, members of parliament, senior bureaucrats and high-ranking officials in the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Education. For 16 years, the UN CEDAW Committee had urged Indonesia to raise its legal marriage age for girls. However, successive governments stalled because conservative groups threatened political opposition.

When KUPI issued its 2017 fatwa declaring child marriage prevention obligatory, it created decisive political momentum. It gave progressive government officials the religious justification they needed, while enabling civil society organisations to partner with parliamentarians. Together, we successfully advocated for the revision of the Marriage Law to raise the legal marriage age for girls from 16 to 19. So now we have the same age for boys and girls.

However, passing a law is only half the battle. While the legal framework is in place, the challenge now lies in changing deep-seated cultural practices. In several rural areas, traditional practices persist, with girls being married at the ages of 9, 12 or 15. Parents often use local customs or religious pretexts to justify these unions. However, with the new law, the government is trying to promote its implementation, with support from KUPI and other organisations.

When dealing with culture, Indonesia faces a distinct challenge that requires a different strategy. Cultural practices involve different key actors—many of whom support child marriage, enjoy deep respect from local populations and wield significant authority within their communities.

When KUPI introduced its new approach, it sought to reshape who holds authority over religious interpretation. KUPI has been quite successful in doing so, in part because Indonesia lacks a centralised or rigid Islamic institution governing Muslim society. Beyond official government structures, religious organisation in Indonesia is largely informal. While this decentralised landscape allows progressive movements like KUPI to take root, it also enables certain local figures to leverage informal authority to justify persistent practices like child marriage.

TDS: Religious authority has traditionally been dominated by men in many Muslim societies. How has Indonesian society responded to the emergence of women ulama, and how has KUPI established its religious legitimacy?

RK: Public reaction has been mixed. Many embraced it, noting that Indonesian history is full of celebrated female Islamic scholars (documented extensively on KUPIpedia.id, a digital archive of female ulama). However, some conservative figures felt threatened by the emergence of female religious authority. To protect activists and scholars from individual attacks, KUPI adopted a strategic approach: redefining Ulama Perempuan (women ulama) as a collective identity rather than an individual title.

Under KUPI's definition, an Ulama Perempuan is not defined by gender alone, nor is it an individual status. It refers to a collective of men and women possessing deep religious knowledge alongside interdisciplinary expertise, living with God-consciousness (taqwa), dedicated to helping victims of gender-based violence and committed to realising Islam as a mercy for all.

Furthermore, KUPI's leadership remains deeply anchored in the traditional pesantren network. This cultural grounding ensures that their authority is respected by traditional families, religious institutions and community elders. Movement leaders must be deeply trusted by the community. We need leaders who possess what you might call cultural power, combined with deep, authoritative knowledge of Islam. Ideally, a leader should have strong roots in the Islamic boarding school tradition because that traditional grounding enables them to command broad support among both families and the wider community.

KUPIpedia.id makes documents and resolutions from KUPI's first two congresses publicly available. KUPI's fatwas are widely consulted by government agencies, parliamentarians, civil society organisations and even conservative groups. Although critics may disagree, engaging with these fatwas encourages dialogue and broader study of Islamic texts beyond conservative interpretations. This culture of debate, alongside more than 16 years of advocacy, contributed to Indonesia's 2019 revision of the Marriage Law, which raised the legal marriage age for girls.

TDS: In many Muslim-majority societies, religious interpretations have been used to restrict women's participation and leadership. How does KUPI challenge these interpretations, and why does it consider women's lived experiences essential to understanding Islamic teachings?

RK: From my experience, the problem begins with who holds religious authority. Religious interpretation has historically been dominated by men, reinforcing the belief that religious leadership belongs to them. Women's biological experiences, including menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth, have often been treated as obstacles to leadership. Combined with patriarchal traditions, this has established men as the ideal religious authorities, despite women's equal knowledge and capacity to lead.

KUPI believes that relying exclusively on male scholars can perpetuate gender biases in religious interpretations and fatwas, sometimes serving the interests of those in authority rather than women, particularly survivors of gender-based violence.

KUPI's methodology begins with the belief that God created men and women as equals, with the same mandate to serve as Khalifah fil Ardh, or stewards of the Earth, and the same responsibility to promote good and prevent wrongdoing. God also entrusted women with the womb and the reproductive responsibilities associated with it. I do not believe a merciful God would create women this way and then reveal religious teachings intended to harm them. Instead, these experiences should be respected and recognised.

This is why KUPI insists that religious scholars consult women when interpreting teachings or issuing fatwas concerning women's bodies and reproductive lives. Men cannot directly experience menstruation, pregnancy or childbirth, so women's perspectives are essential to ensuring justice and equality.

Another challenge is distinguishing Islamic teachings from cultural traditions. Many practices associated with conservative communities, including those in Saudi Arabia, are sometimes treated as Islamic requirements when they are actually rooted in local customs. Such traditions often persist because they benefit those who hold religious authority, particularly men.

I believe religious authority should not be used to maintain power over others. Everyone who follows Islam should have the space to express their understanding of the religion. For KUPI, religious interpretation must be guided by justice, equality and maslahah, the principle of public good and human well-being.

Of course, challenging established interpretations can create tensions, including among male religious scholars in Bangladesh. We therefore need strategies for engaging religious authorities. But women's distinct reproductive experiences cannot be ignored. Their knowledge and lived experiences must be recognised as essential to religious interpretation, particularly on matters directly affecting their lives.

TDS: Child marriage and male-dominated religious authority remain significant challenges across South Asia, including Bangladesh. Drawing on Indonesia's experience, what conditions should countries like Bangladesh develop to strengthen women's religious leadership and advance social reform?

RK: This is a difficult question, but I always advise beginning by studying our own history, particularly the history of women's leadership and how communities accepted it. If these histories are not visible, we need to make them visible.

For example, Aceh, a province in Indonesia that experienced a long period of conflict, was once ruled by great queens. Many other women also demonstrated strong leadership in resisting colonialism while promoting education, social welfare and the protection of Islam. Yet younger generations may know little about their contributions.

Islamic history also offers important examples. Aisha (RA) was a respected authority on Hadith and an important source of knowledge about the life of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). When we started the women ulama movement, we documented the contributions of female Islamic scholars to demonstrate that women have always been credible religious authorities. There is no religious text stating that women cannot become ulama. Reserving this title exclusively for men is a human construction. Universities and educational institutions should help document and promote these histories.

Another important factor is equal access to religious education. In Indonesia, boys and girls can study Islamic teachings through boarding schools, where students are encouraged to explore different interpretations and debate religious texts rather than follow a single perspective. This educational environment has helped movements like KUPI develop.

Collaboration between feminist organisations and religious groups is equally important. When these groups work together, they create stronger foundations for advancing women's rights and religious leadership.

Political opportunities also matter. Changes in the political environment can either support or obstruct women's participation in leadership and decision-making.

From my experience working across different countries over the past ten years, I believe every society must identify its own modalities, or existing conditions that can support such movements. South Asian and Southeast Asian cultures differ significantly, and what works in Indonesia may not work in Bangladesh.

However, both countries can learn from each other by exchanging experiences, identifying local opportunities and promoting good practices. The goal should not be to copy KUPI but to understand the conditions that enabled its emergence and explore how similar opportunities can be developed within each country's own cultural, religious and political context.

The interview was taken by **Adrin Sarwar.**







Where old furniture FINDS NEW HOME

What one household no longer needs can become another's prized possession. As rising living costs push buyers towards affordable alternatives, the second-hand furniture trade is finding new customers and business opportunities

SUKANTA HALDER *and*
TAMANNA YESMIN MARIA

Need to furnish your home but cannot afford new furniture? You are not alone. With rising living costs putting pressure on household budgets, many people are rethinking how they spend. Avijit and Mahima, however, found a way to furnish their homes without stretching their budget.

Avijit, a student who also works in Dhaka, spent months sleeping on the floor because he could not afford a bed. Showrooms quoted Tk 30,000 to Tk 50,000 for a double bed, while even nearby furniture shops asked Tk 15,000 to Tk 25,000.

A friend's suggestion led him to Facebook groups where people sell used furniture. There, he spotted a five-foot by seven-foot bed listed by a woman in Dhanmondi who was moving house.

She had bought it just six months earlier for Tk 16,000 and was now willing to sell it for half that price. Avijit eventually bargained it down further to Tk 6,000.

"My first experience of buying second-hand furniture was excellent," he said. Five months later, the bed is still serving him well.

Mahima had a similar experience. She furnished her rented room with a second-hand bed, wardrobe, table and chairs bought near Mohakhali Kacha Bazar.

"I don't earn much. What would my mother and I do with expensive furniture?" she said, explaining that her mother stays with her only occasionally.

Although she browsed online listings, Mahima preferred visiting shops to inspect the furniture and bargain in person. She found that many used pieces were still in good condition and could help furnish an entire room at a fraction of the cost of new items.

Their experiences reflect a growing trend among students, young professionals and families seeking affordable ways to furnish their homes.

A MARKET BUILT ON AFFORDABILITY

Selim H Rahman, chairman of the Bangladesh Furniture Industries Owners Association, said the second-hand furniture market was expanding as families moving into new apartments often bought new furniture and sold their old belongings.

This creates opportunities for people who cannot afford new furniture while giving used items a second life. He believes the market has considerable room to grow in the coming years.

Traders in Panthapath, Segunbagicha, Azimpur, Mohakhali and other areas said demand for second-hand furniture had grown over the past 15 to 20 years.



Second-hand furniture shops line a narrow alley in Panthapath, displaying wooden cabinets, tables and chairs as rising living costs boost demand for affordable options and create opportunities for traders. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTOS: STAR

"People can buy high-quality, durable furniture at affordable prices, which has driven demand," said Ali Akbar, who has run a furniture shop in Panthapath for 17 years.

His customers include students, families and working professionals.

There are no official figures on the size or growth of Bangladesh's second-hand furniture market. Global estimates, however, suggest strong potential. Research firms Mordor Intelligence, Technavio, Research Nester and Persistence Market Research estimate the market at $41 billion to $49 billion in 2026, with annual growth of around 5 percent to 8 percent expected through the early 2030s.

Most of the furniture sold by local traders comes directly from households, particularly when people move or replace their belongings, Ali said. Some customers even keep shopkeepers' business cards and contact them when they have furniture to sell.

The business, however, does not always offer high returns. A wardrobe bought for Tk 10,000 may require another Tk 5,000 for repairs and polishing. After resale, the shopkeeper may earn only Tk 1,000 to Tk 2,000 in profit before other expenses, he said.

For buyers, the savings can be substantial. Mohammad Jasim Uddin, who has traded in Panthapath for more than a decade, said a piece of furniture that costs Tk 20,000 new could be bought second-hand for Tk 10,000 to Tk 12,000.

He said a piece bought for Tk 5,000 and repaired at a cost of Tk 3,000 could fetch Tk 10,000 to Tk 12,000, leaving a gross profit of Tk 2,000 to Tk 4,000.

Jasim sells at least 30 pieces in an ordinary month, or around 360 a year. Sales can reach nearly 500 pieces annually during better periods.

"Sometimes you sit for a week without selling anything, and one day's sales make up for the entire week," he said.

Abul Kalam, another Panthapath trader who has been in the business for more than two decades, said customer numbers fluctuate widely.

"Some months, we don't even get 10 serious buyers. In others, the number rises to 40 or 50. There is no fixed pattern," he said.

TRADERS STRUGGLE AS SALES SLOW

Not all traders deal only in furniture collected from households.

Sunny, a Segunbagicha trader, also buys unsold factory stock and showroom-clearance items. He sometimes purchases mixed lots from Chattogram, with traders pooling money to buy large consignments through bidding.

His four outlets sell around 200 items a month, generating an estimated Tk 2.5 lakh to Tk 3 lakh in monthly profit before operating costs. Around a quarter of his customers are repeat buyers, while recommendations bring in others.

However, sales have dropped sharply in recent years.

"Around 2022-23, we could sell 20 to 25 pieces a day. Now, selling even five can be difficult," Sunny said.

Other traders also blamed rising living costs for their business woes, while some cited political uncertainty since August 2024.

Ripon Mia, who has been in the furniture trade in Segunbagicha for more than 25 years, said his monthly income had fallen from Tk 20,000 to Tk 40,000 to just Tk 5,000 to Tk 10,000.

Pavement clearance drives have added to their difficulties by reducing the space available to display furniture.

"Earlier, we could display more furniture, allowing customers to see the pieces as they walked past. Now, we cannot even put out four pieces in the space where we once displayed ten," Ripon said.



Sunny said videos of pavement stalls being cleared had also led some customers to believe the entire market had been demolished, even though shops inside were still operating.

In Azimpur, Chan Mia said his sons now run the family business. Although it continues to support the family, sales have slowed compared with previous years.

Rahim Kazi, who sells used furniture near Mirpur 14, reported similar difficulties, with fewer customers and slower sales.

Traders also pointed to growing competition. More furniture outlets have opened in Dhaka and elsewhere, spreading customers across a larger number of businesses.

Younger entrepreneurs are entering the market by buying furniture in bulk from established markets and reselling it through shops and online platforms.

FACEBOOK OPENS UP A WIDER MARKET

Social media has made it easier for people to sell furniture directly to buyers without going through traders.

Facebook groups allow sellers to post photographs, set prices and negotiate through comments and private messages.

A review of Facebook listings found that furniture trading groups had between around 81,000 and 441,000 members, with several recording more than 90 posts a day. However, these figures do not show how many transactions are actually completed.

For some entrepreneurs, online platforms have become the foundation of their businesses.

After his father's death, Sayem Ahmed left his studies and started Messrs Jhamela Kini, meaning "I Buy Hassles", in Mymensingh with limited capital to support himself.

The business collects unwanted furniture and household appliances, including televisions, refrigerators and computers, directly from households. It repairs the items and resells them.

"When people buy new furniture, they often don't know what to do with the old ones. We pay them in cash and collect the items from their homes," Sayem said.

Initially promoted through posters and leaflets, the business has since expanded to three showrooms and employs around 20 to 25 people. Its team collects unwanted items from up to 10 households a day, generating an estimated monthly income of Tk 1 lakh.

It now relies mainly on online sales to reach customers beyond Mymensingh.

"Customers place orders through our page, and we deliver across Bangladesh," a company representative said. Some buyers even pay through bKash without seeing the products in person.

A DIFFERENT SOURCE OF SECOND-HAND GOODS

Social media has also helped traders selling furniture recovered from dismantled ships reach customers across the country.

Hasan Imam, an MBA graduate with a regular job, has been selling such furniture and other goods in Bhatiari, Chattogram, for more than two years. He operates a physical shop in Faujdarhat and uses videos on social media to attract buyers.

He estimated that around 100 to 150 shops between City Gate and Madambibirhat sell goods recovered from ships, including furniture, crockery, cables and steel items.

Traders acquire these goods through competitive tenders after inspecting them. Hasan also buys furniture from office auctions but does not deal in used household furniture.

The price difference can be substantial. A two-door wooden wardrobe sells for Tk 15,000 to Tk 20,000, compared with Tk 50,000 to Tk 60,000 for a new one made of teakwood, he said.

His shop earns around Tk 60,000 to Tk 70,000 a month before expenses. After paying rent, staff wages and electricity bills, he is left with Tk 20,000 to Tk 25,000 in an average month.

Business has slowed recently, with customer numbers varying widely. Some months bring only two or three buyers, while customers visit every day during busier periods. Around 18 out of every 20 customers buy furniture for their homes, he said.



There are also opportunities to make money by trading in bulk. Traders sometimes buy ship consignments worth Tk 20 lakh and resell them to other dealers without collecting the goods themselves. Such deals can generate profits of Tk 20,000 to Tk 1 lakh, Hasan said.

Setting up a small resale business requires Tk 15 lakh to Tk 20 lakh in capital. Buying salvaged goods directly through tenders, however, may require at least Tk 1 crore.

Despite the recent slowdown, Hasan sees considerable potential in the business, particularly as online platforms allow traders to reach buyers far beyond their local markets.