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Readymade garment workers block the Dhaka-Tangail Highway in the Chandra Palli Bidyut area of Gazipur's Kaliakoir upazila yesterday, demanding a wage hike. The demonstration began around 9:00am, bringing traffic to a standstill on both sides of the highway for over two hours. Police later fired teargas canisters and sound grenades to disperse the protesters, leaving several workers injured. PHOTO: STAR

RMG owners may invoke 'no work, no pay' from today

Industry leaders give nod as wage unrest enters third week

STAR REPORT

Industry leaders have given garment factory owners the go-ahead to shut their units under the "no work, no pay" provision of the labour law from today if ongoing labour unrest continues to disrupt operations across major industrial hubs.

At least 147 factories employing around 3 lakh workers were unable to operate yesterday because of the unrest. Of them, 55 factories have already invoked the "no work, no pay" provision of the labour law, while production at another 92 units was severely disrupted before they were forced to shut down.

The decision was announced yesterday by BGMEA President Mahmud Hasan Khan at a joint press briefing following an emergency meeting of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) at its Uttara office in Dhaka.

Leaders of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) also attended the meeting and expressed solidarity with the move.

Section 13(1) of the Bangladesh Labour Act allows employers to suspend operations and withhold wages when production is disrupted.

Mahmud said 147 factories employing around 3 lakh workers were unable to operate yesterday because of the unrest. Of them, 55 factories had already invoked Section 13(1), while production at another 92 units was severely disrupted before they were forced to shut down.

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GDP growth overstated by up to 1.3 points since FY15

Forensic audit blames factories' self-reported production figures, inflated export numbers among others

MD ASADUZ ZAMAN

Bangladesh's GDP growth was overstated by 0.7 to 1.3 percentage points annually from FY2014-15 onwards, largely due to inconsistencies in manufacturing data, unverified tax figures, and unreliable administrative records, according to a forensic audit by a government panel.

It identified seven major sources of overestimation: factories' self-reported production figures, the use of tax collection data to estimate industrial output, inflated export figures, unverified production data from state-run monopolies, flawed construction estimates, mechanical projections for small industries, and incorrect subsidy adjustments.

The findings suggest the economy was portrayed more favourably than it actually was during the Awami League government's tenure, when reported GDP growth climbed to nearly 8 percent

The seven-member panel presented its initial findings at the BBS headquarters in Dhaka yesterday, seeking feedback from stakeholders.

Experts said the findings underscore the need to restore the credibility of official statistics, as inaccurate GDP estimates can distort economic priorities and lead to flawed policy decisions.

Officials said steps had been taken to improve the consistency of official data, including the introduction of an integrated system to strengthen tax data reporting and the decision to use Bangladesh Bank's export figures as the authoritative source.

The discrepancies largely involved secondary and administrative data rather than information collected directly through Bangladesh Bureau of

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Trump, Xi, Putin to meet in China

AFP, *Washington*

Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping will hold the first three-way meeting between the leaders of the United States, Russia and China at a summit in Shenzhen on Thursday.

Trump wants to talk about reducing nuclear arsenals at the trilateral talks and is also set to bring up his war in Iran -- but he is not expected to discuss Russia's war in Ukraine, US officials said.

The three leaders will meet on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4





بِسۡمِ اللّٰہِ الرَّحۡمٰنِ الرَّحِیۡمِ

In Everlasting Memory of



MD. MUJIBUR RAHMAN

Founder Chairman of Blessing Group
Managing Director of Roxy Paints Ltd.
Former President of Bangladesh Paints Dyes & Chemicals Merchants Association

On his 6th Death Anniversary

The void he left, no one can heal. The memories that we cherish no one can steal. His values will continue to inspire us to take his noble works forward. He will live on with us always in our thoughts and forever in our hearts.

Deeply missed and remembered by.....

(15 November, 2020)

BLESSING GROUP

Ex-BDR member's body found on Indian side of Feni river

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Khagrachhari*

The body of a 66-year-old Bangladeshi man was found in the Feni river near the Ramgarh border in Khagrachhari yesterday morning, a day after he went missing while collecting grass for cattle.

The body of Angthepru Marma was found submerged in water on the Indian side of the Feni river, near the Sabroom border area of South Tripura, said police.

Family members and the Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Ramgarh Police Station Md Nazir Alam confirmed that he was a member of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), now Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB).

BGB-43 Ramgarh Battalion Assistant Director Shamsul Haque said after receiving news of the man's disappearance on Friday night, BGB informed the Border Security Force (BSF) about the incident and sought its help locating him.

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This bridge over the Pagla river in Chapainawabganj's Shibganj upazila has a gap in the middle despite the completion of the approaches on both banks. Work on the structure, a key link between neighbouring unions, has remained stalled for about a year, forcing vehicles and pedestrians to continue using an ageing iron bridge next to it. PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

Mob beats madrasa teacher over alleged sexual harassment

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Noakhali*

A group of locals beat a madrasa teacher over allegations of sexually harassing a class 3 student in Begumganj upazila of Noakhali yesterday.

The incident took place on the premises of a Hafizia madrasa this afternoon. The accused, Saiful Islam, is an assistant teacher at the madrasa, said Sub-Inspector Mehedi Hasan, in-charge of Rajganj Police Outpost under Begumganj Police Station.

SI Mehedi said the teacher allegedly molested the 10-year-old student when she went to the madrasa in the morning.

After classes ended around 1:00pm, the girl returned home and told her mother about the alleged sexual harassment. Her mother later informed locals about the matter. As the news spread, hundreds of men and women went to the madrasa, detained the teacher and beat him.

Police went at the scene after being informed and rescued the accused teacher, Mehedi said.

As the police team was escorting him to the police station, locals hurled brickbats at them and tried to obstruct them from taking him away. Several police personnel were injured in the incident, said the SI. ANM Imran Khan, additional superintendent of police (Begumganj circle) in Noakhali, said the accused teacher is currently in police custody.

Citing the student's mother, he said the teacher had touched the girl inappropriately when she went to the madrasa in the morning. Preparations are underway to file a case.

Locals alleged that the teacher had done the same thing to other students several times before. They demanded a fair investigation and strict legal action against him.

RMG owners may invoke 'no work, no pay' from today

FROM PAGE 1

Nearly 1,500 factory owners attended the meeting, where many voiced concerns over their inability to continue production amid repeated demonstrations, vandalism and work stoppages.

According to BGMEA leaders, workers in some factories have been leaving their workplaces after clocking in, while others have allegedly been involved in attacks on industrial establishments.

Most factory owners supported invoking the "no work, no pay" provision if normal operations cannot be ensured from today, Mahmud said.

The industry is hopeful that the government will restore law and order in the affected industrial belts quickly, allowing production to resume uninterrupted, he added.

"The garment industry is the country's largest source of industrial employment and a key driver of export earnings. Restoring normalcy is essential," he said.

The BGMEA chief also urged factory owners, labour leaders, government agencies, civil society and the media to play a constructive role in helping ease tensions.

The labour unrest has now entered its third week despite the formation of a wage board tasked with recommending a new minimum wage for garment workers. The board is scheduled to hold its third meeting tomorrow.

Workers' representatives on the board have already proposed a minimum monthly wage of Tk 32,000.

Mahmud said employers would present their wage proposal at tomorrow's meeting.

However, he noted that many factory owners questioned the viability of wage negotiations if production and workplace security cannot be guaranteed.

Meanwhile, leaders of five labour federations on Friday urged workers to return to their jobs, arguing that the wage board process should be allowed to proceed.

The union leaders also highlighted recent amendments to labour laws, including raising the annual wage increment from 5 percent to 9 percent and reducing the wage review period from five years to three.

They acknowledged, however, that current wages remain inadequate given the rising cost of essential commodities.

Workers' representatives have proposed a minimum monthly wage of Tk 32,000. Employers will present their wage proposal at tomorrow's meeting. However, many factory owners questioned the viability of wage negotiations if production and workplace security cannot be guaranteed.

FRESH PROTESTS

In Gazipur, garment workers blocked the Dhaka-Tangail Highway in Kaliakoir yesterday morning, demanding a wage hike.

The blockade began around 9:00am in the Chandra Palli Bidyut area and continued for about two and a half hours, said Kaliakair Police Station Officer-in-Charge Sahidul Islam.

The protest brought traffic to a standstill, forcing many commuters to abandon vehicles and walk to their destinations.

Police cleared the highway around 11:30am and restored traffic movement.

At least 20 people were detained on sabotage-related charges, the OC said.

Gazipur Industrial Police Superintendent Md Amzad Hossain said workers from 11 nearby factories had joined the demonstration. The factories later declared a holiday.

In the Savar-Ashulia industrial belt, at least 12 factories where workers did not join work yesterday also declared holidays.

With those additions, operations remained suspended at 59 factories amid the prolonged unrest, according to Mohammad Mominul Islam Bhuiyan, superintendent of Ashulia Industrial Police-1.

He said 18 factories had been closed under Section 13(1) of the labour law, while 17 others had been shut indefinitely. Five factories were verbally declared closed, and seven announced general holidays.

"After work began today, 12 more factories where workers did not join work declared holidays. As a result, production did not take place in a total of 59 factories today," he said.

A meeting between law enforcement officials and labour leaders was held at the office of the industrial police superintendent yesterday afternoon to review the situation, said worker leader Khairul Mamun Mintu, who attended the meeting.

[Our correspondents from Savar and Gazipur contributed to this report.]

Trump, Xi, Putin to meet in China

FROM PAGE 1

the southern Chinese city, White House spokeswoman Olivia Wales told reporters.

"The president has made it clear that, among other topics, he will discuss the reduction of nuclear weapons in the world. This proliferation, President Trump believes, is very dangerous," Wales said.

One of the major conflicts dominating Trump's second term as president will feature, but the other will not, the US officials said.

"I think the president does intend to talk about Iran in the trilateral meeting with Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin," a senior US official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told reporters on a call.

Washington has a "whole other track" of negotiations with Kyiv and Moscow aimed at ending the war in Ukraine, the official added, referring to talks that US envoys have had in recent days with Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

"China is not really a part of that track, so it doesn't seem appropriate to have the Ukraine discussion there," the official added.

YALTA REDUX?

The meeting calls back to the 1945 Yalta summit in the Soviet Union, where then-US president Franklin D. Roosevelt, Britain's Winston Churchill and Soviet leader Joseph Stalin laid out the post-WWII settlement and new territorial boundaries in Europe.

Zelensky has raised the alarm that the meeting in Shenzhen could be a Yalta-like "redistribution of spheres of influence" for the 21st century.

The Trump administration has sought to reassert US dominance over the "Western hemisphere" -- including by capturing Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro in January -- but splitting the world among great powers like it's 1945 may not guarantee security.

Trump will also hold a bilateral working lunch and meeting with the Chinese president on Thursday -- their fourth meeting since the US president's return to power last year.

But Trump is not scheduled to have a separate one-on-one with Putin.

Among other topics, Nvidia chief executive Jensen Huang's resignation over an affair with an alleged Chinese spy is not expected to come up in Trump's meetings with Xi, the officials said.

"The situation with Nvidia should not really have any bearing on the trip," a second US senior official said.

The United States also did not plan to discuss export controls on sensitive chip technology, which were at the heart of the Nvidia scandal.

"We do not negotiate American export controls. These are national security matters that we develop in the administration... and we don't expect it to figure at all in any of our conversations with the Chinese while we're there," the second official said.

Tesla and SpaceX boss Elon Musk will accompany Trump on his trip to China but will not be involved in the meeting with Xi and Putin, the officials said.

Trump will leave Washington on Monday and arrive in the Philippines on Tuesday for a summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) before heading to Shenzhen.

'He said he would return tomorrow'

Family left without sole breadwinner as bus driver dies following Faridpur arson attack

SHAHRIAR HOSSAIN, *Gopalganj*

On the night of November 9, bus driver Md Kalachan Sheikh, 60, told his wife that he would spend the night on the bus and return home the following day after completing his trip.

But that night, arsonists set fire to the parked bus while he was sleeping inside. He managed to escape the flames but collapsed shortly afterwards.

He was taken to Faridpur Medical College Hospital, where he was declared dead -- never to return to his family.

The Kishore-Tanay Paribahan bus, which operated on the Faridpur-Tekerhat-Madaripur route, was parked near Goalchamat New Bus Stand.

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, Kalachan's wife, Moyna Begum, recalled their last conversation.

"He called me around 10:00pm on Monday after eating at a hotel and said, 'I won't come home today; I'll return tomorrow. I have to spend the night on the bus.'"

Moyna learnt about the fire around 2:30am the following day.

"I was told that my husband died of smoke inhalation. How will I survive with my three children and an ailing mother-in-law after losing the family's sole breadwinner?

"I have two sons and a daughter. My elder son has completed higher secondary education but is unemployed, while my younger son is in class nine. We were planning the wedding of our only daughter. Who will look after us now?" she said, breaking down in tears at their home in Diknagar village of Gopalganj's Muksudpur upazila.



Md Kalachan Sheikh

She demanded a fair investigation into her husband's death and punishment for those responsible.

Kalachan's elder son, Mithun Sheikh, said, "My father died while guarding the bus at night. However, the bus owners have not contacted us or provided any assistance so far.

"Many people have advised us to file a case. But against whom should we file one? So far, no one has even informed us whether any case has been filed over my father's death. Besides, we do not even have the financial means to pursue a case.

"The police should investigate the incident and uncover the actual facts."

Abdul Haque Hawladar, joint general secretary of Muksudpur thana BNP, said, "Kalachan Sheikh was a good man. The entire family depended on his income. His death has now left the family facing an uncertain future."

Md Shamsul Azam, additional superintendent of police (Crime and Ops) in Faridpur, said bus owner Tapan Kumar Das had filed a case against unidentified persons over the arson on November 12.

No one had been arrested in connection with the case as of 7:00pm yesterday, he added.

Kalachan was killed amid a wave of violence across the country on the night of November 9 and the following day, during which eight vehicles were torched and crude bombs exploded in different parts of the country, including Dhaka.

GDP growth overstated by up to 1.3 points since FY15

FROM PAGE 1

Statistics (BBS) surveys, said Prof AK Enamul Haque, director general of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) and a panel member.

About 60 percent of the data comes from the BBS, while 40 percent comes from secondary sources, according to him. "It is very important to triangulate data from secondary sources, particularly when unusually large increases are observed," he said.

The findings also suggest the economy was portrayed more favourably than it actually was during the Awami League government's tenure, when reported GDP growth climbed to nearly 8 percent.

"The overestimation was intended to serve political interests and promote a development narrative, particularly in sectors where reliable primary data were unavailable and estimates relied on administrative or secondary sources," Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir, finance and planning adviser to the prime minister, said at the presentation.

INDUSTRIAL OUTPUT

The panel examined 22 industrial subsectors and found sharp discrepancies in several, where reported production growth was not supported by corresponding economic activity.

Cement production, for instance, was reported to have grown by 61.6 percent, 51.7 percent and 45.9 percent in three consecutive years, but the figures did not tally with the industry's contribution to GDP, Titumir said.

"If cement production is reported at a particular level, the corresponding value addition reflected in GDP must be consistent with the data of related sectors. But those figures did not match," he said.

Shipbuilding recorded growth of 242.4 percent in FY2014-15 and 97.6 percent the following year. The panel suspected the figures were inflated by counting a single large order, early-stage activities such as steel cutting, or one company's output as that of the entire sector.

Some estimates relied entirely on a single company. Petroleum refining, for example, was reported to have grown by 87.4 percent in FY2015-16 before contracting by 50.3 percent the following year, with both figures based solely on data from Eastern Refinery.

The sharp increases in 16 of the 22 subsectors were also at odds with slower growth in the readymade garment (RMG) industry, which accounts for 34.84 percent of the Quantum Index of Industrial Production.

RMG growth fell from an average of 13.55 percent during FY2010-11 to FY2013-14 to 8.69 percent during FY2014-15 to FY2015-16. The sector was largely unaffected by the data problems because reliable data were available, Titumir said.

TAX, EXPORT

The audit also found weaknesses in administrative data from the National Board of Revenue (NBR) and the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB).

The NBR reported revenue growth of 20 percent in FY2014-15 and 23 percent in FY2016-17, before the rate gradually declined.

The panel also found discrepancies among export figures reported by the EPB, Customs and Bangladesh Bank.

Titumir said NBR figures had been inconsistent before the introduction of the Integrated Budget and Accounting System (iBAS). The government has since decided to treat Bangladesh Bank's export figures as authoritative and taken steps to reconcile the discrepancies.

Asked whether the audit would identify those responsible, Statistics and Informatics Division Secretary Md Firoz Sarker said the aim was to identify weaknesses rather than assign blame.

PAST REVIEWS

The credibility of Bangladesh's GDP figures had been questioned earlier.

The 2024 White Paper Committee challenged the sustained growth reported since FY2012-13, citing gaps between official GDP figures and indicators such as tax collection, private investment, and bank lending.

A 2022 World Bank analysis also found discrepancies with official estimates.

The IMF gave Bangladesh's national accounts framework a "C" grade in 2024, citing delays in data publication, while a 2025 expert task force flagged a lack of institutional independence and the risk of political influence in GDP estimation.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Towfiqul Islam Khan, additional research director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, who led the White Paper's research and technical support team, said the audit echoed its concerns.

"When we prepared the White Paper, we also highlighted similar discrepancies, particularly mismatches between export data and proxy indicators. Although we did not quantify the extent of overestimation, we pointed to these inconsistencies," he said.

He said even a small annual overstatement could have significant consequences over time. "An overestimation of less than one percentage point may appear small in a particular year. But when it continues over 12 to 15 years, the cumulative impact becomes significant and cannot be ignored," he said.

Towfiqul attributed the problem to both technical weaknesses and political motivations, saying inflated growth figures had distorted development priorities and diverted attention from underlying economic weaknesses. Outdated proxy indicators and surveys also contributed.

STRONGER SAFEGUARDS

Enamul called for standardised data collection templates, regular updates of industrial statistics, and systematic reconciliation of figures from different government agencies.

He said GDP compilation and release should remain the professional responsibility of the BBS, backed by technical expertise, independent peer reviews and its own data-management software.

Speaking at the presentation, National Professor Mahbub Ullah, president of the Bangladesh Economic Association, called for aligning GDP estimation with the UN System of National Accounts to improve international comparability.

"The more we collect data directly from the field, the more reliable our estimates will be. However, sample sizes must be determined carefully to ensure they properly represent the entire population," he said.

He also proposed a national economic input-output matrix to capture links among production activities, such as those between cement and sand, and sand and bricks.

Towfiqul called for strengthening the BBS's technical capacity and institutional independence, alongside greater transparency and accountability.

"Ultimately, the government itself loses when GDP is not estimated properly, because policymaking based on inaccurate data cannot be sound," he said.





Involve retired officials in cleanliness drives in Dhaka

PM directs authorities

UNB, *Dhaka*

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman yesterday directed the authorities to involve retired government officials and senior citizens in neighbourhood-level cleanliness campaigns as part of his vision for a "Clean Dhaka, Green Dhaka".

The directive came at a review meeting on Dhaka's cleanliness activities, chaired by the prime minister at his office. LGRD State Minister Mir Shahe Alam disclosed this at a briefing at the PMO later in the afternoon.

He said around 39,000 retired government officials and employees live in Dhaka, and their experience could be used for public welfare.

"The prime minister has directed us to involve these retired officials in the programme in every neighbourhood across the

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Dinesh Chandra championed a pluralistic Bangalee identity

Speakers call for preserving his legacy at Star Itihas Adda

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dinesh Chandra Sen's contributions to Bangalee folk literature have shaped the region's cultural identity, and preserving his legacy is essential to inspiring future generations, speakers said at an event yesterday.

They highlighted Sen's role in documenting folk traditions, challenging colonial and elitist biases, and promoting an inclusive and pluralistic Bangalee identity rooted in the shared heritage of Hindus and Muslims.

They said Sen brought rural voices, particularly those of marginalised communities, into mainstream literary history and helped preserve Bengal's rich oral traditions.

They stressed the need to take his work beyond academic institutions and make it accessible to wider audiences, noting that opportunities to discuss his contributions outside formal academic circles remain limited.

The remarks came at the 37th edition of The Daily Star Itihas Adda, titled "Dinesh Chandra Sen and Our Debt", held at The Daily Star Centre.

Historian Dipesh Chakrabarty, joining virtually, said Dinesh Chandra Sen challenged the 19th-century Kolkata elite's prejudice against rural folk culture and recognised the contributions of both Hindu and Muslim communities to Bangla literature.

He said Sen's "Bangabhasha O Sahitya", published in 1896, broke with conventional literary histories by acknowledging Persian and Islamic influences on Bangalee writers and documenting rural folk traditions.

Despite opposition from sections of the educated Hindu elite, Sen collected folk songs, ballads and manuscripts, recognising them as expressions of Bangalee identity.



Participants at the 37th edition of The Daily Star Itihas Adda, titled "Dinesh Chandra Sen and Our Debt", held at The Daily Star Centre yesterday. PHOTO: **PALASH KHAN**

Sen viewed folk literature as an expression of ordinary people's philosophical wisdom and humanistic values, Chakrabarty said, adding, "Through collections such as 'Maimansingha Gitika', Sen highlighted the shared cultural heritage and communal harmony of Hindus and Muslims."

He also credited Sen with supporting emerging Muslim writers, particularly Jasimuddin, helping secure the publication of "Nokshi Kanthar Math" and its inclusion in the Calcutta University curriculum.

Sen's work, he said, reflected an inclusive vision of Bangalee identity that transcended class and religious divisions.

Researcher and essayist Prof Syed Azizul Haque said British colonial rulers portrayed Bangalees as lacking education, culture and tradition, while presenting Europeans as bringers of enlightenment.

This created an inferiority complex among the educated Bangalee elite, who often equated English proficiency with enlightenment and undervalued their own language and heritage, he said.

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IN FOCUS

Proposed cyber law could stifle govt criticism

Speakers demand removal of repressive provisions

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 18 people were arrested for expressing their views, including criticism of the prime minister, ministers and government representatives, between February 17 and November 13 this year, after the BNP-led government took office, according to rights organisation Odhikar.

The organisation disclosed the figure at a discussion titled "Crisis of Freedom of Expression and Democratic System" in Dhaka yesterday.

Speakers warned that the proposed Cyber Security (Amendment) Act 2026 could criminalise online expression, restrict criticism of the government and allow arbitrary enforcement. They called for repealing its repressive provisions.

Jamaat MP Mir Ahmad Bin Quasem said businesspeople were complaining about worsening business conditions, their inability to pay workers' salaries and having to rent out their shops to survive.

He warned that anyone speaking publicly about such problems could face arrest on allegations of spreading misinformation or rumours under the proposed law.

He said even as an elected lawmaker, he feared arrest for criticising the government.

"Imagine the kind of fear this law could create among ordinary people."

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4

Local govt sidelined in urban planning

Speakers blame centralised decisions, bureaucratic control

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Local government institutions are being sidelined in urban planning and development, weakening city corporations and municipalities and worsening infrastructure problems and public suffering, speakers at a dialogue said yesterday.

They blamed unilateral decisions by development authorities, bureaucratic complexities and political interference for reducing city corporations largely to waste management and mosquito control agencies.

The dialogue was organised by the Urban Development Journalists' Forum Bangladesh (UDJFB) at the CIRDAP auditorium in Dhaka.

Adil Mohammed Khan, executive director of Institute for Planning and Development, said urban planning decisions were increasingly influenced by business interests and bureaucrats, leaving local government institutions with little say.

KEY ISSUES

- City corporations excluded from major decisions
- Poor coordination hampers master plans
- High-rises strain roads, utilities and services
- Over half of municipal posts vacant

He alleged that amendments to the Detailed Area Plan were sometimes made without transparency or public

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80% of new healthcare workers to be women

Says Zubaida

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is recruiting 1 lakh healthcare workers, 80 percent of them women, to provide preventive healthcare services at people's doorsteps, Dr Zubaida Rahman, vice-president of the Ziaur Rahman Foundation, said yesterday.

She made the announcement at a programme marking the 12th

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'She's still hurting the nation even after fleeing'

Says Shafiqur on Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



Opposition Leader and Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman yesterday said ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina, who has been sentenced to death, continues to cause suffering to the nation even after fleeing the country.

"Even after fleeing, she is causing pain to the nation. Remember, this nation does not wake up easily. But once it does, it does not let go," he said while speaking at a youth conference in Dhaka.

Without directly referring to Hasina's announcement that she would return home, he said Jamaat would hold a series of programmes throughout December and mobilise all its strength to make them successful. "It is not to stop anyone. There will be no need to stop her. If she is so good, she would not have left. None of our leaders left the country..."

Legal gaps hinder justice for custodial torture victims

Speakers call for accountability, stronger safeguards

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Loopholes in the law on custodial torture and death are allowing accused individuals to escape punishment, rights activists said at a discussion yesterday.

They called for amendments to the law, an independent body to investigate allegations of custodial torture and death, increased compensation for victims, and protection for victims and their families.

The discussion, organised by Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) at The Daily Star Centre in Dhaka, was attended by lawyers, rights activists, victims of custodial torture and families of those who died in custody.

Participants called for amendments to the law, an independent body to probe allegations, increased compensation for victims, and protection for victims and their families.

Supreme Court lawyer Qazi Zahed Iqbal said the Torture and Custodial Death (Prohibition) Act, 2013, has no provision for abetment.

"As a result, accused persons who are not members of law enforcement

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Man, twin daughters found dead in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Chattogram*

Police recovered the hanging body of a 50-year-old man and the bodies of his five-month-old twin daughters from a locked room at his in-laws' house in Banshkhali upazila of Chattogram on Friday evening.

The deceased are Md Jahed Hossain of Azani Para in East Chambal union of the upazila, and his daughters Jarin Jannat and Jasia Jannat.

The incident took place around 6:00pm at Mawlar Para in Pui Chhari union, said Banshkhali Police Station Officer-in-Charge Md Robiul Haque.

According to police and locals, the room was locked from inside while Jahed's wife and other family members were away on an errand. They discovered the bodies after returning home.

Md Mizanur Rahman, an official of Banshkhali Fire Service and Civil Defence Station, said a team reached the scene around 6:00pm.

"They found Jahed hanging from a beam inside the room, while the two children were lying side by side on the floor beside a bed", he said.

The bodies were sent for autopsies, said the OC. "Legal steps will be taken after receiving the autopsy reports", he added.

PRAYER TIMING
NOVEMBER 15

	Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN	5-05	12-45	3-45	5-21	7-00
JAMAAT	5-40	1-15	4-00	5-24	7-30

SOURCE: **ISLAMIC FOUNDATION**

A family stands guard where railway has none

Nur Islam, family guarding Jagtha rail crossing in Thakurgaon for over 5yrs

MD QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT, *Thakurgaon*

For a living, Nur Islam transports bodies for Pirganj Police Station on a battery-run rickshaw-van. But for over five years, the landless man has taken on another responsibility: saving lives at a railway crossing where he witnessed two people being killed by a train.

Since January 2021, Nur and his family have been voluntarily guarding an unauthorised railway crossing in the Jagtha area of Thakurgaon's Pirganj municipality, using a makeshift bamboo barrier to stop vehicles whenever a train approaches.

The initiative began after a fatal accident on January 11, 2021.

According to Md Sohrab Hossain Sujon, station master of Pirganj Railway Station, Ruhul Amin, 45, an employee of Thakurgaon Judge Court, and his former colleague Abdus Sobhan, 59, were travelling on a motorcycle to serve a court notice in Pirganj upazila when a Dhaka-bound Drutojan Express hit them at the crossing.

Nur witnessed the accident. The following day, he bought bamboo and ropes, erected a makeshift barrier and began guarding the crossing.

"I saw two people being killed by a train right before my eyes. After that incident, I decided to do whatever I could to help save others' lives. It gives me peace of mind," he said.

Since then, he has remained alert to approaching trains, rushing to lower the barrier whenever he hears a whistle. When he goes to work, family members take turns guarding the crossing.

During a recent visit, vehicles were seen waiting on both sides of the crossing as a train approached.

Standing beside the tracks, Nur pulled a rope to lower the bamboo barrier, holding back traffic. Once the train passed, he raised it, allowing vehicles to cross.

Nur lives with his wife, five sons and grandchildren on a small plot of land north of the railway station.

Even his grandson Bishal Hossain, who has a disability, regularly helps guard the crossing.

"My father is working selflessly for others. We support and encourage him," said Nur's son Naushad Hossain.

Neighbour Md Sagar Hossain said Nur had bought the bamboo and ropes with his own money and never sought payment.

Milon, a motorcyclist who uses the crossing several times daily, said a major accident could occur there without Nur's presence.

According to Nur, six trains pass through the crossing daily: the Panchagarh-bound Dolonchapa Express around 7:00am, the Dhaka-bound Drutojan Express around 8:30am, the Rajshahi-bound Banglabandha Express around 10:00am, the Dhaka-bound Panchagarh Express around 1:00pm, the regional Kanchan Express around 4:00pm, and the Dhaka-bound Ekota Express around 10:30pm.

But he receives no advance information about train movements from railway authorities.

"What does it matter? All we need to do is remain alert for train whistles," he said.

Station Master Sohrab Hossain confirmed that the crossing was unauthorised and Nur was working voluntarily.

He said there was no departmental instruction to inform Nur about train arrivals and departures.

Md Ferdous, divisional transport officer at the Lalmonirhat Railway Office, said a level-crossing gate was not included in the station's original design.

Asked when a gate would be authorised, he said he needed to consult the engineering department.



PHOTO: **STAR**

Nur Islam guards the Jagtha rail crossing in Pirganj, Thakurgaon as a train passes.

IN BRIEF

Savar man arrested over wife's murder

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Savar*

Neighbours detained a man and handed him over to police over the alleged murder of his wife in Dhaka's Savar yesterday.

Police, quoting locals, said Bablu Mia, 40, killed his wife, Rozina Begum, 30, with a knife at their home in the Tetuljhora area early in the day.

Neighbours later detained Bablu and handed him over to police.

Confirming the incident, Md Mosharraf Hossain, inspector (investigation) of Savar Model Police Station, told The Daily Star that Bablu works as a street vendor, while his wife Rozina was employed at a local garment factory.

The couple got into an argument in the morning over a family dispute. At one point, Bablu slit Rozina's throat with a knife, he said, citing neighbours.

Upon receiving information, police detained Bablu and took him into custody.

Rozina's body was recovered and sent to the morgue of Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital in Dhaka for autopsy.

"The process of filing a case is underway. The accused will be shown arrested in the case and produced before a court tomorrow [today]," Md Mosharraf added.

Dengue claims eight more lives

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



At least eight more people died of dengue and 1,674 were hospitalised across the country in the 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

Of the latest fatalities, six were reported in Dhaka division and one each in Chattogram and Rajshahi divisions.

With the latest deaths, the country's dengue toll has risen to 491, while the cumulative number of cases has reached 1,60,557.

Currently, 5,915 dengue patients are receiving treatment at hospitals nationwide.

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Do Bangladesh and India still need the Ganges Treaty?

What 30 years of data reveal about its successes and failures

SHAFIQUL ISLAM

The Ganges Water Sharing Treaty expires on 12 December. Thirty years of joint observation and allocation at Farakka will end with it unless something takes their place, and the record those thirty years have produced has not been closely examined in public.

It is worth reading because almost every finding in it contradicts something believed in one capital or the other. The allocation formula was implemented better than the argument in Dhaka assumes. The river's gain between the two gauges is real, but it has never been quantified publicly. And the alternating ten-day guarantee that both governments treat as the treaty's central protective mechanism largely does not survive the journey downstream, so it is not doing what either believes. The numbers that follow come from the public record. The narratives depend on who is reading and how.

THE RECORD, AND ONE CAVEAT ABOUT IT

The record covers 450 ten-day periods: thirty dry seasons from 1997 to 2026, fifteen periods each from 1 January to 31 May. Every period carries four quantities: total flow available at Farakka, the release to India, the release to Bangladesh, and the flow observed at Hardinge Bridge, downstream inside Bangladesh and below the Mahananda confluence. The data come from the Joint Rivers Commission's published record.

One caveat belongs at the beginning rather than in a footnote because it limits what can objectively be claimed from the record.

In all 450 periods over the last 30 years, availability at Farakka is exactly the sum of the two releases. Availability is therefore an accounting quantity, not an independent measurement, so testing whether the releases followed the formula shows that an agreed account is internally consistent. It does not confirm what the river actually did.

The Hardinge Bridge observation sits outside this availability accounting.

WHAT THE FORMULA DELIVERED

Of 450 releases to Bangladesh, 375 were within 0.5 cusec of the formula applied to recorded availability, and 384 within 1 cusec. Twenty periods fell more than 1 cusec short, three of them by more than 100. One period in thirty years breached the ninety-per-cent threshold of Article XI: 1–10 April 1997, with a shortfall of 4,863 cusec. There is no shortfall above 1 cusec anywhere in the record after 2003. Departures favoured Bangladesh: 3.66 billion cubic metres of surplus against 0.143 billion cubic metres of shortfall. These are observed figures. Two qualifications matter before they become a story.

One year accounts for most of the surplus. 2012 alone accounts for 2.15 of the 3.66 billion cubic metres: from January to early March that year, India took 21,000 to 32,000 cusecs instead of 40,000, which suggests a feeder-canal or barrage constraint rather than a concession. Hardinge Bridge, moreover, recorded less than the release in six of those seven periods, so the recorded surplus barely appears downstream. Set 2012 aside and the ratio falls from about 25 to one to about 10 to one: still in Bangladesh's favour, but a different claim. Only the Joint Committee's operating records could settle which explanation is correct, and they are not public.

Availability shows no trend. It was tested in four ways: the whole dry season, the critical period, the rest of the season, and the annual minimum. None shows a statistically significant trend. So the claim that India has been taking progressively more is not supported by this record. Neither is the claim that flows are stable: thirty seasons cannot separate a slow change from year-to-year variation, and the 2007–2016 decade ran some eight per cent below the decades on either side. A thirty-year treaty can contain a dry decade that its own trend test cannot detect.

HOW MUCH THE RIVER ADDS

Between Farakka and Hardinge Bridge, the river gains water: from the Mahananda, from groundwater, and from irrigation return flows. That much is uncontested, and it forms the basis of a claim now circulating in Indian commentary: that Bangladesh already receives more than the treaty gives it, and that renewal should adjust the shares accordingly. An analysis using the same Joint Rivers Commission data observes that flows at Hardinge Bridge have generally been higher than releases at Farakka, and interprets this as favouring upstream India in hydrodiplomacy.



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

An aerial view of the Padma River reveals extensive sandbars exposed by declining dry-season flows, highlighting concerns over water availability downstream of the Farakka Barrage.

The analysis does not quantify the gain. Bangladeshi accounts, for their part, tend not to mention the gain at all. The record is unkind to both.

The relationship between Farakka and Hardinge Bridge is strong. The river gains water between these two locations and gains proportionally more when flows are high. At the median, the gain is about 11 per cent. The gain is also not uniform. The higher range occurs in January, when flows are heavy. During the critical period from 11 March to 10 May, the gain stops increasing with flow, and in Bangladesh's own guarantee periods, it vanishes altogether. Hardinge Bridge recorded less than the Farakka release in 88 of 450 periods, with a mean deficit of 3,728 cusec and a maximum of 15,098. Eighty-eight periods out of 450 are not a rounding error in a claim about downstream abundance.

THE ALTERNATING GUARANTEE

Under Annexure I, each country is guaranteed 35,000 cusec in three alternating ten-day periods between 11 March and 10 May. Bangladesh's are the second period of March and the first and third periods of April; India's are the third period of March, the second period of April and the first period of May, as the indicative schedule in Annexure II sets out. This alternation is the treaty's central protective mechanism.

averaging of ten-day figures could all produce this effect, and a difference in measurement timing between the two stations cannot be ruled out.

This is not an argument about generosity or compliance, and the implication runs in both directions. A protection designed around alternating ten-day pulses at Farakka is largely erased by the river before the water reaches the stretch where Bangladesh uses it. Dhaka treats that guarantee as the protection it most needs to restore; Delhi treats it as a commitment it would rather not formalise. On this record, neither position is accurate. The guarantee delivers very little additional water to where Bangladesh uses it, and an argument about strengthening or resisting it is an argument about something largely notional.

THE CONSULTATION THRESHOLD

The treaty contains a second protective mechanism. Article II provides for immediate consultations between the two governments when availability at Farakka falls below 50,000 cusec.

In 450 periods, that threshold was crossed only once: 21–31 March 1997, at 48,487 cusec.

Whatever one thinks of consultation as an instrument, a trigger set at that level would have operated only once in thirty years. Neither government has published an analysis of how often a strengthened provision would be triggered.

WHERE THE DISAGREEMENT ACTUALLY IS

Set the transmission question aside, and the remaining disagreement is not about numbers at all. It is about where the risk of uncertainty and a changing climate should lie: upstream, downstream or shared through a formula.

The argument against a volumetric guarantee is sound as far as it goes: an unconditional fixed volume places climate risk on the upstream party. Bangladesh could argue that, as the downstream party, it already bears the consequences of every shortfall. Both propositions are true. Which one should prevail is a question of values, and no dataset can settle it. Acknowledging this is not a concession; it is the precondition for arguing about design rather than motive. Principled pragmatism begins here: not by splitting the difference, but by separating the questions that data can resolve from those they cannot.

It holds that strict adherence to principle without pragmatism is usually not actionable, and that pragmatism without principle is neither sustainable nor equitable. The operating rule that follows is narrow and useful: compromise over interests is possible and actionable, while compromising principles is not. The task, therefore, is not to establish the truth about the Ganges, but to agree on a truth that is negotiable and implementable, given the capacity, constraints and context the two countries actually face.



Hardinge Bridge in Pabna. The bridge is a crucial monitoring point for Ganges flows entering Bangladesh, providing data that help assess the downstream effects of water releases at Farakka.

Applied here, the dispute reorganises itself. Whether India or Bangladesh should bear the risk of a drier future is a question of principle, and neither capital will concede it before 12 December. Whether the alternating guarantee transmits downstream is a question of fact, and the record answers it: largely, it does not. That answer is useful precisely because it favours neither party. It tells Dhaka that its central demand, as presently designed, would deliver little of what is being sought; it tells Delhi that the commitment it is reluctant to formalise would transfer very little additional water downstream. An argument over principle becomes an argument over instrument design, which is more tractable.

The same logic dissolves the apparent either-or options. Bangladesh needs dry-season reliability; India needs protection against committing to volumes that a changing climate may not deliver. The 1996 treaty treated these as alternatives and split the difference by alternating ten-day pulses, which, as the record shows, delivered neither. A percentage floor within a schedule that adjusts to availability is one instrument that could address both concerns, because it is contingent by construction: it does not require any particular climate future to materialise. Whether it is the best instrument is a separate question, and one this record cannot settle. What the record does establish is what principled pragmatism demands of any instrument: not optimality, but a resolution that still works when the assumptions behind it fail.

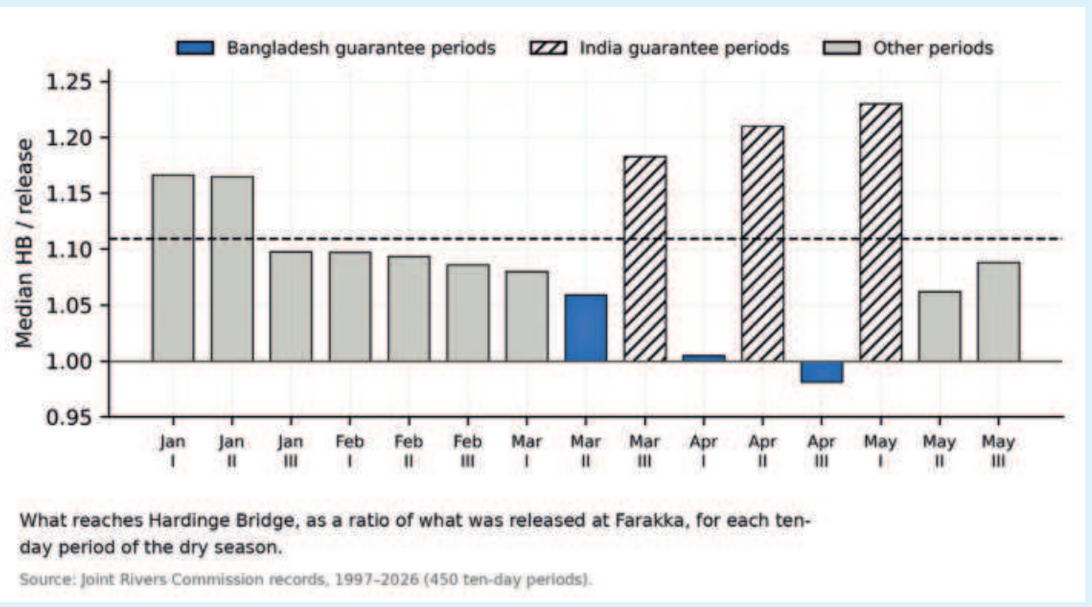
Set the transmission question aside, and the remaining disagreement is not about numbers at all. It is about where the risk of uncertainty and a changing climate should lie: upstream, downstream or shared through a formula.

WHAT ENDS ON 12 DECEMBER

Water diplomacy starts with a question that seems trivial: what is one plus one? The answer depends on who is asked and why. These 450 records support Delhi's reading that Bangladesh already receives more than the treaty gives it, and Dhaka's reading that the dry season is short. Both interpretations are present in the data. Neither is complete. one finding neither side can explain alone is that the gain between the two stations is growing by roughly 2,000 cusec per decade. It could be tributary inflow, a changed rating curve or channel change, and nobody can say which, though each possibility carries different consequences for the two parties. No unilateral record can distinguish between them. Joint observation could, and the answer could just as easily vindicate Delhi as Dhaka: if the growing gain comes from tributary inflow, the river is delivering more than the treaty allocates, which is what Indian commentary contends. It costs neither country water and concedes nothing on who should bear climate risk.

That observation falls under the Joint Committee, a body established under Article IV. If the treaty lapses on 12 December with nothing in its place, the mandate lapses with it, and the 2027 dry season becomes the first since 1996 without joint measurements.

India and Bangladesh agree on very little about this river. For thirty years, they measured it the same way anyway, and every finding above exists because they did. Measurement allocates no water, which is why it is the easiest thing on the renewal table to preserve. It is also why losing it would be the hardest of the losses on 12 December to justify. The treaty does end on its own terms. But the Joint Rivers Commission, which predates it by twenty-four years, does not, and nothing prevents the two governments from keeping the gauges operating under that older mandate while they work out what replaces the rest.



What reaches Hardinge Bridge, as a ratio of what was released at Farakka, for each ten-day period of the dry season.

Source: Joint Rivers Commission records, 1997–2026 (450 ten-day periods).

11 March – 10 May	Mean release at Farakka	Mean at Hardinge Bridge	Periods with Hardinge Bridge below release
Bangladesh's guarantee periods	38,642	40,168	39 of 90
India's guarantee periods	33,408	39,795	10 of 90
Within-year paired difference	+5,234	+373	–

Bangladesh's guarantee periods raise the release at Farakka by 5,234 cusec. At Hardinge Bridge, that becomes 373 cusec, statistically indistinguishable from zero. Even in the periods when the guarantee actually increased Bangladesh's release, only about a fifth of the extra water arrived. The periods when Hardinge Bridge records less than the release occur almost four times as often during Bangladesh's own guarantee periods: 39 of 90, compared with 10 of 90 during India's.

The reason is that the river smooths out the alternation. What arrives at Hardinge Bridge tracks roughly the average of the current and preceding releases, rather than the current release alone. Travel time, channel storage and the

Setting them side by side is the first step, because two parties reasoning from the same numbers to opposite conclusions cannot negotiate until they understand why.

The second question is where to intervene. Measurement is not negotiable; what is negotiable is the point at which a change affects the system. On this record, that point is not the volume at Farakka, which both capitals have contested for thirty years. It is where, and over what period, a guarantee is defined. A pulse that exists at the barrage but not at Hardinge Bridge is not an allocation problem but a design problem, and design problems allow for more solutions.

The third is the hardest: when positions are entrenched, look for the eighteenth camel, the borrowed thing that makes an indivisible problem divisible and is returned once the problem is resolved. Here, that is measurement itself.

The

Shafiqul Islam *is a professor of Engineering and Diplomacy at Tufts University, where he directs the Water Diplomacy Program and teaches at the School of Engineering and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. He is a 2025–26 Radcliffe Fellow at Harvard University.*



The Farakka Barrage in India, where the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty regulates dry-season water allocation between India and Bangladesh. FILE PHOTO

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

Keep politics out of fertiliser dealerships

Fertiliser supply must not be held hostage by bribery and favouritism

According to an investigation by this newspaper, ruling party leaders, their relatives, and connected individuals who neither have experience in the fertiliser business nor possess the required credentials have managed to become dealers, leaving many established traders in the lurch. We saw this same trend of vested groups hogging dealerships through political patronage during the previous Awami League regime. The new report is therefore all too familiar, only the hands have changed.

There are allegations of political favourotism or nepotism in several districts, including Kushtia, Rangpur, Brahmanbaria, Jhenaidah, Rajshahi, and Thakurgaon. In Gangachara upazila Rangpur division, the wives of upazila BNP president and general secretary received dealerships in their respective unions. In Pirgachha too, wives of upazila BNP members received fertiliser dealerships. In Kushtia, at least 50 to 70 dealerships went to BNP-linked individuals or their relatives. In Brahmanbaria a BNP lawmaker's son and other relatives secured dealerships. When asked how his son, who has no prior experience in this trade, was eligible, the MP said that BNP activists had been "deprived" under the previous government. This acutely symbolises the sense of entitlement that political parties adopt after coming to power.

The BNP must leave behind such feelings of obligation to 'reward' party loyalists through appointments and contracts. As an economist quoted in the report has pointed out, dealerships being acquired through political patronage and money usually results in corruption and inefficiency, while keeping qualified traders out of the business.

This is disappointing, to say the least. The BNP must leave behind such feelings of obligation to "reward" party loyalists through appointments and contracts. As an economist quoted in the report has pointed out, dealerships being acquired through political patronage and money usually results in corruption and inefficiency, while keeping qualified traders out of the business.

In August, the scarcity of fertiliser during the peak planting season was attributed to government-appointed dealers who allegedly withheld stocks or overcharged farmers through retail agents. Some dealers obtain multiple licences under different company names or through influential relatives to manipulate the supply and prices of fertiliser. Allowing inexperienced dealers to operate will inevitably lead to more fertiliser shortages, which in turn will threaten our food security.

Policy requires dealers to be permanent residents of the area and to have ownership or lease of a warehouse with a minimum capacity of 50 tonnes of fertiliser. How many of those awarded dealerships are compliant with the requirements? This deserves urgent scrutiny by relevant authorities.

The government must reassess all dealership appointments and make them public. Officials involved in taking bribes to facilitate dealerships must be identified and punished according to law. Warehouses must be inspected and their eligibility verified. Those which do not meet the policy requirements or are found to have bribed officials must have their licences cancelled. At a time when the government is grappling with major energy shortages due to the war in the Middle East, a fertiliser crisis resulting from partisanship and corruption will be felt keenly by already struggling farmers.

Tourism taking a toll on Chera Dwip

Weak enforcement is putting Saint Martin's fragile biodiversity at risk

We are alarmed by the unabated and environmentally harmful tourist activity in Chera Dwip on Saint Martin's Island. The government's 12-point guidelines include several restrictions to protect the island's environment and biodiversity, including lighting fires or using lights on the beach at night, making excessive noise, organising barbecue parties, and entering Chera Dwip. However, with the decision to keep the island open to tourists from November 1 this year to March 15 next year, Department of Environment (DoE) staff and volunteers are struggling to enforce these restrictions. A reported average of 2,000 tourists travel to and from the island daily on three vessels, with more than 230 hotels, resorts, and cottages to accommodate them despite not having environmental clearance. Tourists are using easy bikes (or "tomtoms") and rented motorcycles and bicycles to travel within the island, often crushing protected species such as red crabs, snails, mussels, and other living beings under the vehicles' wheels.

This outcome, however, is hardly shocking. Last month, we asked in this column whether any evidence of ecological recovery or any credible assessment justified increasing the daily visitor limit by 75 percent and extending the tourism season. With the season now ongoing, it is clear that authorities are unprepared to protect the island's biodiversity. Even with restrictions in place and Chera Dwip being cordoned off by rope barriers and red flags, tourists continue to visit the area every day. The DoE has very few volunteers to enforce restrictions, compared to the hordes of tourists being allowed to stay on the island. Many resort owners reportedly dump waste directly into the sea instead of disposing of it properly, while attempts to stop easy bikes from operating have faced resistance.

All this points to the government's two-fold failure in conserving the island's biodiverse species and in enforcing its own guidelines to that end. It is unacceptable that the profits of businesses, which are operating without necessary clearance, are being prioritised over the protection of an island designated by the government itself as an Ecologically Critical Area (ECA).

We urge the government to consider reducing the tourism window for Saint Martin's Island as well as revising the number of tourists allowed in daily. Environmentalists have claimed that previous tourism bans had shown positive changes in the island's environment. Hotel and resort owners must also be held to account for not abiding by waste disposal rules. No amount of tourism revenue can make up for losses in the island's biodiversity.

Who guards the depositors? The other side of bad loans



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■ **M NIAZ ASADULLAH**

Bangladesh's debate over its banking crisis may finally be asking a question it has long neglected. Speaking at a Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management (BIBM) conference in late October, Professor Wahiduddin Mahmud, former adviser for planning to the interim government, argued that laws and regulations alone cannot restore discipline to the financial sector. He reminded us that a minimum level of ethics is also required among those who participate in banking and business. An editorial published in *The Daily Star* on October 30, 2026, reflecting on the same discussion, rightly called for stronger safeguards against financial irregularities and renewed action against wilful defaulters.

With non-performing loans (NPLs) now exceeding Tk 6 lakh crore and accounting for roughly one-third of outstanding credit, Bangladesh needs stronger recovery, better regulation, and greater political resolve. And where politically connected borrowers deliberately avoid repayment despite having the capacity to pay, accountability is indispensable.

But the latest scrutiny is incomplete. Our banking crisis continues to be viewed overwhelmingly from the borrower's side of the transaction. We ask who borrowed irresponsibly, who became a wilful defaulter, who benefited from political connections, and who moved money abroad. These are necessary questions. But they obscure another one: who approved the loans in the first place?

Ethics cannot remain an appeal to individual morality. It must be translated into the institutional architecture of accountability. For years, the standard policy response to banking distress has centred on stronger laws, tighter regulations, loan recovery and, increasingly, political will. But regulation principally tells bankers what they may or may not do. Fiduciary leadership brings up the question of what a professional entrusted with other people's money should refuse to do, even when political pressure is intense or regulatory rules leave room for discretion.

Every large loan passes through multiple layers of professional judgement before the money moves. Credit officers assess repayment capacity, risk managers examine exposures, committees scrutinise proposals, managing directors and chief executives exercise executive authority, and boards carry out oversight responsibilities. Political influence can create enormous pressure on this process. But a borrower, however powerful, cannot single-handedly create a bank loan.

This supply side of bad banking remains remarkably underdeveloped in our public conversation.

Unlike most ordinary businesses, banks do not primarily lend out their own money. They allocate resources entrusted to them by lakhs of depositors—school teachers, factory workers, pensioners, family members of overseas migrant workers, small entrepreneurs, and households saving for their children's futures. Banks' responsibility therefore extends beyond profitability or satisfying shareholders. They are custodians of other people's money, especially that of the working middle class.

The leadership obligation arising from this relationship can be described as fiduciary leadership. A fiduciary leader is not merely a successful corporate manager. He or she is a steward, someone expected to exercise independent judgement, protect institutional integrity, and safeguard the interests of those whose resources have been entrusted to the institution. For a bank's chief executive, that responsibility includes something easily overlooked during periods of rapid credit expansion: the professional capacity to say "no".

Not every bad loan represents misconduct and banking inherently involves risk. A sound loan can become distressed because of an economic downturn, exchange rate shock, energy shortage, or unexpected collapse in demand. Bangladesh therefore needs to distinguish genuine commercial failure from wilful default.

But the same distinction must be applied to lenders.

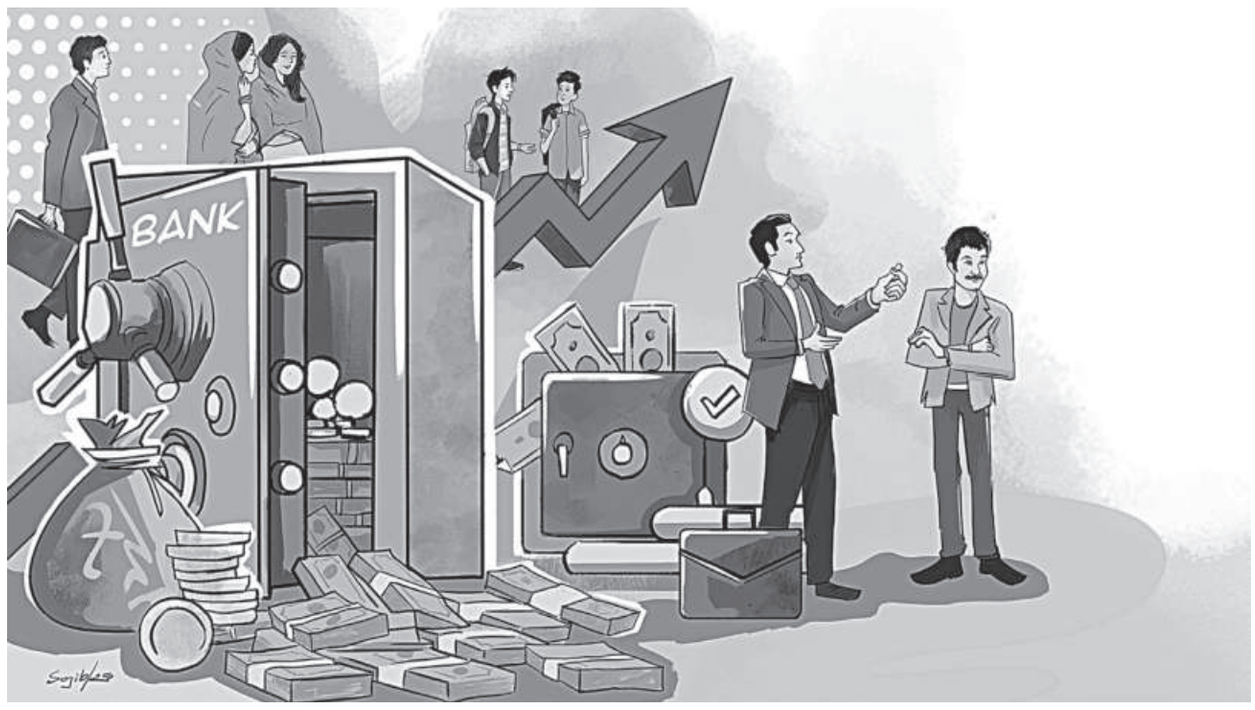
There is a difference between an honestly mistaken credit judgement and lending that ignores obvious warning signs, excessive borrower concentration, inadequate collateral, unrealistic cash-flow assumptions, or repeated restructuring intended principally to postpone recognition of losses. The first is an unavoidable feature of banking. The second raises questions of professional and fiduciary responsibility.

Ethics cannot remain an appeal to individual morality. It must be translated into the institutional architecture of accountability. For years, the standard policy response to banking distress has centred on stronger laws, tighter regulations, loan recovery and, increasingly, political will. But regulation principally tells bankers what they may or may not do. Fiduciary leadership brings up the question of what a professional entrusted with other people's money should refuse to do, even when political pressure is intense or regulatory rules leave room for discretion.

Bangladesh's political economy makes that question especially difficult. In parts of the banking system, professional judgement has long operated alongside political influence. Board appointments, lending relationships, and regulatory forbearance have sometimes rewarded accommodation over independence. Refusing an influential borrower can carry professional costs; accommodating one may appear safer. Under such conditions, institutional incentives gradually crowd out professional norms.

Economists would recognise part of this as moral hazard. Decision-makers take greater risks when they expect others to bear the eventual costs. If bank executives believe that distressed loans will repeatedly be restructured, politically connected borrowers protected, or troubled institutions eventually recapitalised, the downside from poor lending decisions becomes separated from the original decision-maker. A loan approved today may generate interest income and apparent profits before becoming tomorrow's NPL. By then, the executive who approved it may have moved elsewhere, while depositors, shareholders, successor management, or ultimately taxpayers inherit the consequences.

Encouragingly, Bangladesh Bank's reforms introduced in mid-September appear to recognise this problem. Its new performance framework for bank managing directors and chief executives gives relatively little weight to profitability alone, while placing much greater emphasis on asset quality, solvency, liquidity, governance, and internal controls. Performance is also intended to influence remuneration, incentives, and reappointment. That is an important shift as it implicitly recognises that a bank leader's performance cannot be judged simply by how rapidly loans or profits grow.



FILE ILLUSTRATION: **SOJIB ROY**

The same principle should guide the next stage of reform. Boards must protect independent credit and risk functions; regulators should scrutinise not merely whether procedures were followed but whether senior executives repeatedly overrode prudent risk judgement; executive performance should be assessed over sufficiently long horizons to capture the consequences of lending decisions; and accountability must distinguish legitimate commercial mistakes from negligence, reckless accommodation, and intentional disregard of fiduciary obligations.

Professor Wahiduddin Mahmud is right to put ethics back into the banking conversation. But ethics becomes meaningful only when we identify whose duty is involved, to whom that duty is owed, and what happens when it is breached. Bangladesh must certainly pursue wilful defaulters. But every bad loan has two sides. Lasting banking reform requires scrutiny not only of those who took other people's money, but also of those entrusted with deciding whether the money should be given away to less reliable borrowers. Banks do not create trust, they borrow it from society. Fiduciary leadership is the obligation to return that trust intact.

Water must move to the centre of climate action



Jigmi Y. Thinley is a former prime minister of Bhutan and member of the Global Leadership Council of Sanitation and Water for All (SWA).

■ **JIGMI Y. THINLEY**

For three decades, the international response to climate change has focused on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The energy transition has become central to this effort, shaping national policies, mobilising investment, and driving innovation. Now, as the world confronts the consequences of climate change already under way, we must give water the same prominence in our approach to adaptation.

Water is how most people first experience climate change. Whether through prolonged drought, devastating floods, or increasingly unpredictable rainfall, its effects reach directly into people's lives, threatening food production, livelihoods, public health, and economic security.

So, if energy has been the defining concern of climate mitigation, water must become the defining concern of adaptation. And for this to be effective, recognition must be matched by adequate resources and meaningful action. Water already features in the national climate plans of most countries, and is the sector most frequently identified in their adaptation measures. Yet inclusion in a national plan is not the same as meaningful action. Currently, investment remains insufficient, fragmented, and poorly coordinated.

The scale of the shortfall is considerable. A 2024 report by the World Bank estimates that developing countries need an additional $131.4 billion-$140.8 billion annually to achieve universal access to safe drinking water and sanitation by 2030. Behind this figure are communities without reliable drinking water, children exposed to preventable disease, and populations whose livelihoods and security are threatened by drought and flooding.

Water infrastructure, sanitation, and resilient water management cannot remain underfunded priorities in countries' national adaptation strategies. They require sustained investment, clear accountability, and political leadership capable of translating plans into tangible improvements in people's lives.

Leaders, therefore, must close the gap between their commitments and the resources allocated to fulfil them. Water infrastructure, sanitation, and resilient water management cannot remain underfunded priorities in countries' national adaptation strategies. They require sustained investment, clear accountability, and political leadership capable of translating plans into tangible improvements in people's lives.

There are encouraging examples of the leadership required. The Madrid Compact, endorsed by 30 governments, offers a framework for stronger political commitment, integrated policies, sustainable financing, and accountability. The Heads of State Initiatives, supported by the Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) partnership, has demonstrated how national leadership can translate commitments on water and sanitation into action. These approaches deserve wider application.

The same determination is needed internationally. Water connects the three Rio Conventions, which address climate change, biodiversity loss, and land degradation. Yet their respective work does not always reflect the interconnected nature of these challenges, or the central role water plays across all three.

COP31, currently underway in Antalya, Türkiye, offers an opportunity to change this. I call on world leaders to give water a stronger and more systematic place across the Rio Conventions, ensuring that their policies, programmes, and investments are better aligned. This does not require new institutions or additional bureaucracy. It requires greater coordination through the structures we already have, with water recognised as a shared priority rather than an issue confined to individual policy discussions.

This commitment should then be carried forward to the UN Water Conference in Abu Dhabi in December, co-hosted by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Senegal. The conference provides an important opportunity to turn the political momentum generated at COP31 into a more coherent international approach, with water firmly embedded in the global response to interconnected environmental challenges.

We cannot afford to treat adaptation as secondary to mitigation, or water as secondary to adaptation. Leaders must recognise water as fundamental to the security, prosperity, and wellbeing of their people, match their commitments with the necessary investment, and work together across the Rio Conventions.

The decisions made at COP31 and carried forward to Abu Dhabi can help establish the political foundations for a more water-secure future. What is needed now is the determination to act.

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Garment workers' minimum wages should be based on data, not just bargaining



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Views expressed in this article are the author's own.

■ KAZI IQBAL

Amid ongoing protests by garment workers demanding fair wages, factory shutdowns, road blockades and police action, one can recognise a pattern that crystallised in 2006, 2010, 2013, and again in 2023. A minimum wage was fixed on each occasion, only to be gradually eroded by inflation in the years that followed, and eventually triggering another round of worker protests. Under pressure, a wage board was convened and after a few weeks of bargaining between two sides that do not even share a common set of facts, a new figure emerged.

The disagreement itself is not the problem: workers and employers will naturally protect their own respective interests. The problem is that the board has no decisive evidence against which to judge their claims, so the outcome depends on who can bring more workers onto the street or warn more convincingly of factory closures. That's why an evidence-based approach to setting the minimum wage is required, built on independent research papers prepared by economists before the board decides.



PHOTO: STAR

Police fired tear shells to disperse RMG garment workers who blocked a highway in Gazipur on Saturday, November 14, demanding fair wages.

Workers and employers will naturally protect their own respective interests. The problem is that the board has no decisive evidence against which to judge their claims, so the outcome depends on who can bring more workers onto the street or warn more convincingly of factory closures. That's why an evidence-based approach to setting the minimum wage is required, built on independent research papers prepared by economists before the board decides.

The entry-level minimum wage in the garment sector was Tk 627 in 1986. It was raised to Tk 930 in 1994, Tk 1,662.50 in 2006, Tk 3,000 in 2010, Tk 5,300 in 2013, Tk 8,000 in 2018, and Tk 12,500 in December 2023. Gaps between revisions ranged from three to 12 years, and each revision raised the nominal wage by between 48 and 80 percent.

Those headline increases look large. Measured in constant prices, though, they look very different. Between one revision and the next, the purchasing power of each wage structure fell by 22 to 46 percent. The 1994 minimum wage lost almost half its value over the 12 years it remained in force. The 2018 wage lost 28 percent of its value over five years.

Using the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics' 12-month average inflation rates since November 2023, a worker would need about Tk 16,326 today to buy what Tk 12,500 bought in December 2023. The real value of the entry-level minimum wage has fallen by roughly 23 percent. A worker who has stayed in the same job and received the annual increments on basic pay now earns roughly Tk 13,500 to Tk 13,760, still 16 to 18 percent below the inflation-adjusted level.

The 2026 amendment to the Labour Act shortened the interval between revisions under Section 139(6) from five years to three. That limits how real wage erosion can run, but it says nothing about how wages should move in between. Even the annual increment, raised from 5 to 9 percent in December 2024 after the July uprising and resultant unrest, remains disputed.

What the law says and a possible remedy

In setting the wages, Section 141 of the Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 directs the board to take into account the cost of living, the standard of living, the cost of production, productivity, the price of products, inflation, the nature and risk of work, business capability, and the economic and social conditions of the country and the locality. The 2026 amendments did not change this section, which creates three gaps.

The first is method. The law lists about a dozen factors but gives no weights, no formula, and no specified data source.

The second is an imbalance in the evidence itself. The factors that favour workers are measured monthly by the state. The factors that favour employers are not measured by anyone independent. There are no regular credible sources on costs of production, profit margins, or buyers' pressure.

The third gap is the most consequential: the buyers. The law binds only domestic employers. Yet the free-on-board (FOB) price that determines a factory's revenue is negotiated with international brands, and a handful of large buyers face many competing suppliers, which has, over time, apparently reduced prices per kilogram of exports.

The board should be given a common, published evidence base before negotiations begin, so that both workers and factory owners argue from the same numbers. The National Pay Commission in 2024-2025 for revising the national salary structure for public sector employees also used research-based evidence for its exercise.

Concretely, the board should commission an independent team of economists to prepare a background paper, with its data and methods made public. At a minimum, it should cover six things. First, cost of living by industrial area, covering food, rent, health, education and transport for worker households in Dhaka, Gazipur, Narayanganj, and Chattogram, with explicit assumptions on household size and number of earners, which drive most of the gap between existing living cost estimates.

Second, a price index weighted by workers' spending. The national CPI does not reflect a garment worker's consumption basket. With non-food inflation at a 41-month high of 9.89 percent in October, the difference matters. Third, a factory survey stratified by size and subcontracting status, measuring labour's share of FOB, cost per minute, line efficiency, and net margins. Fourth, buyer prices and purchasing practices, which should include unit-price trends by product, and show whether labour is costed separately in price negotiations, and whether brands commit in writing to adjust prices in line with mandated wage increases.

Fifth, the employment effects of past revisions should be considered. What happened to employment, factory closures, and women's participation after 2013, 2018, and 2023, using Labour Force Surveys and establishment data. And finally, the wage structure: the gaps between grades and the share of basic pay in the total, since overtime, festival bonuses, and end-of-service benefits are all calculated on basic pay.

The research paper should also propose a rule for the years between full reviews. A simple version would raise the minimum wage each year by the previous year's inflation, measured by the worker-weighted index, plus an agreed share of the sector's productivity growth. The share would be fixed on a tripartite basis for three years, after which the board would conduct a full review. The present annual increment does not achieve this, as it applies only to basic pay.

Since the present board must make its decision within weeks, a full background paper cannot be completed in that time. Because of that constraint, the new entry-level wage should not be set below Tk 16,300. That figure is not a real increase; it only restores the purchasing power workers had in December 2023. However, how far the wage should rise above that floor, whether to Tk 20,000 or beyond, cannot responsibly be decided without the evidence described earlier.

As for buyers, their role cannot be ensured by Bangladeshi law. But an independent, published estimate of what a wage increase costs per garment, set against falling unit prices, would give the government, employers, and unions a shared basis on which to ask brands to pay their share. Bangladesh has spent four decades setting garment wages through protest and last-minute bargaining. The three-year cycle created by the 2026 amendment offers an opportunity to establish a wage-setting practice in which all parties agree in advance on the principles, criteria, and evidence that will inform wage revisions.

Information commission has a chance to win back public trust

Dr Shamsul Bari and Ruhi Naz are chairman and deputy director (RTI), respectively, at Research Initiatives, Bangladesh (RIB). They can be reached at rib@citech-bd.com.

■ SHAMSUL BARI *and*
■ RUHI NAZ

On October 23, in an article published by The Daily Star, we welcomed the newly appointed information commissioners following over two years of uncertainty, and shared some thoughts on the tasks and responsibilities facing them. Then, at a seminar on October 29, Prof Nahreen Islam Khan, the chief information commissioner (CIC), delivered an address providing an encouraging basis for continuing that discussion. Speaking to grassroots Right to Information (RTI) practitioners, she described the commission as their "fellow campaigner" and placed citizens' empowerment at the centre of its work.

The setting itself was significant. Prof Nahreen Islam, the first woman to hold that post in the country, chose to begin her tenure among people who use the law in their everyday struggles, and their experience can reveal more about the state of RTI than any formal institutional account.

Several of her comments and commitments merit attention: bringing the commission's services closer to district and upazila residents, acknowledging submissions through mobile messages, increasing public awareness, consulting experienced practitioners, and establishing a research wing. These address difficulties long encountered by RTI users, while also providing a basis for sustained engagement between the commission and citizens.

Perhaps the most valuable part of her address concerned the purpose of RTI. She spoke of enabling people to move from being mere subjects to becoming conscious citizens with a sense of ownership of the state. Those who have worked with grassroots applicants will recognise how important this transformation is. A person who learns to question a public authority begins to understand that public institutions must answer to the people. The commission has an important role to play in bringing about this change. Access to information about a local project, a school's expenditure, or access to public services, for example, enables and encourages public participation in decisions affecting their lives. Each successful application can help establish a relationship of accountability where previously there was only dependence on official goodwill.

The CIC's assurance of impartiality is equally welcome. Asked whether the commission would stand with citizens or the government, she replied that it would be neutral. This deserves careful consideration. Impartial adjudication requires a fair hearing for all parties and decisions free from political influence. It also requires recognition that applicants and public authorities seldom approach a dispute with equal resources or influence. The commission must, therefore, ensure that ordinary citizens can effectively challenge an official refusal. Helping applicants understand procedures, closely examining an authority's justification, and addressing obstruction are essential to fair adjudication. Its fidelity must be to the law and the right it protects, regardless of who exercises governmental power.

The promise to bring services closer to citizens, if fulfilled, can also make a difference. For an RTI applicant, travelling to Dhaka may entail lost wages, additional transport costs, and considerable anxiety. Local hearings, remote participation where feasible, and practical assistance with complaints would reduce these burdens. Such arrangements should retain accessible options for people without smartphones, reliable internet access, or digital skills.

Acknowledgements through mobile phones would also help. Applicants should know that their submissions have been received and how to follow their progress. A receipt, however, is only the beginning. A useful system would show what happens next and help citizens obtain a timely, reasoned response. Technology should make the institution easier to reach and its case handling easier to track.

The CIC also expressed hope that complaints would decline as authorities began routinely supplying information. This is indeed a desirable destination, but complaint numbers require careful interpretation. Fewer complaints may indicate responsive administration; they may also reflect ignorance, discouragement, or fear. If confidence returns under the new commission, an initial increase in complaints could be a welcome sign that citizens believe redress is possible. Success will eventually be assessed through actual access to information, compliance with decisions, and applicants' experiences. The proposed research wing could help develop these indicators, identify recurring obstacles, and examine why certain authorities repeatedly fail to respond. Its findings should inform corrective action and be made available to the public.

That said, there are institutional limitations that need to be considered. According to the CIC, the commission had only 23 staff members, fewer than half its sanctioned strength. She also reported inheriting 917 complaints, with more than 100 added within days. These figures underline the need for adequate staffing and a practical plan for clearing the backlog. The government should, therefore, address genuine resource shortages promptly while respecting the commission's independence. The latter, in turn, should publish a work plan setting out priorities, milestones, and targeted achievements. Citizens would then be able to distinguish constraints requiring government interventions from matters within the commission's own control.

Information fairs, workshops, and consultations can support this effort. Their value will depend on whether participants subsequently use the law and obtain information. The commission should duly follow up after such awareness events, taking into account who applies, what response they receive, and where they need assistance. Listening regularly to unsuccessful applicants may be particularly instructive.

The CIC's concern about privacy and the abuse of women also deserves attention. RTI must be administered with due regard for lawful protections of personal information. At the same time, concerns about misuse must not cast suspicion on legitimate applicants or provide a broad excuse for withholding public-interest information. Each request deserves to be examined on its merits.

As she drew her remarks to a close, Prof Nahreen Islam returned to an earlier speaker's comparison of the information commission to the proverbial "porosh pathor", or touchstone. She offered her own analogy. She said she wanted the commission to be like an ordinary stone that any citizen could reach for and use. That image held wisdom. Public confidence grows through everyday encounters in which citizens find an institution easy to approach and can count on it to respond.

The address, and indeed the long-overdue reconstitution of the commission, have opened a welcome opportunity for dialogue between the commission and RTI practitioners. Practitioners should bring to that dialogue a spirit of cooperation, practical experience, and candid scrutiny. The commission, in turn, should build trust through accessible services, fair and reasoned decisions, and effective follow-up. Can citizens who have kept the law alive through difficult years hope that their persistence will finally be matched by a dependable institutional partner? Only time will tell.

GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BANGLADESH
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e-Tender Notice

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Tender ID No. / Reference No./ Procurement Type	Name of Tender	Tender Publication Date and Time	Last date & Time for Tender Security Submission	Tender Closing & Opening Date & Time
1	2	3	4	5
Tender ID: 1370919 **Invitation Reference No.:** 15.54.3025.023.07.013.26 **Procurement Type:** NCT **Procurement Method:** Open Tendering Method (OTM)	**Maintenance work of Central Ac equipment, Chiller, AHU and FCU**	15-Nov-2026 14:00 BST	25-Nov-2026 14:00 BST	25-Nov-2026 15:00 BST

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PHOTOS: **SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED**

‘Art First’: A new chapter in artistry initiated by DD Art Gallery

NAVEEN ISLAM TOREE

“Art First” was the slogan DD Art Gallery founder and curator Rizwan Bin Farouq put forward before the audience on November 13, reflecting his passion for art and its place in Bangladesh. Despite the country’s wealth of artistic talent, recognising and adequately compensating artists, craftsmen and sculptors remains a challenge – one that has shaped the gallery’s philosophy over the years.

Bringing together the works of 35 distinguished contemporary artists, DD Art Gallery inaugurated a group art exhibition on November 13 at its new premises in Gulshan-1, Dhaka, marking a new chapter in its journey of promoting Bangladeshi art.

Presented by Dhaka Bank, the exhibition features established names alongside artists from newer generations, offering visitors a glimpse into the diversity of Bangladesh’s contemporary art scene. The participating artists include Shahabuddin Ahmed, Hashem Khan, Monirul Islam, Rafiqun Nabi, Farida Zaman, Rokeya Sultana, Jamal Ahmed, Kanak Chanpa Chakma, Nisar Hossain, Nazia Andaleeb Preema, Vinita Karim, and several others.

The programme began at 6:30 pm, with Miss World Bangladesh 2026 Samanzaar Sayeed hosting the event.

The opening remarks were delivered by Rizwan, who addressed the philosophy of “Art First” and the need to create greater appreciation for artistic expression.

Finance and Planning Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, the chief guest at the event, spoke about the importance of integrating artists and creative professionals into Bangladesh’s economic development. “What we want to do is bring artists and art to the forefront of the economy and growth factor of Bangladesh. The whole idea of the creative economy is to support the artists, artisans and craftsmen all over the country,” he said.

Emphasising the importance of financial sustainability, he added, “All the artists who have been struggling, we want to help them, financially support them and provide them with a market and branding platform.” He also highlighted the need for art critics who could evaluate artworks and establish their market value.



Following the speeches, the guests took part in the ribbon-cutting ceremony, formally inaugurating the gallery’s new premises and exhibition.

Among the featured works are Shahabuddin Ahmed’s ***Running*** and ***Hanging***, Rafiqun Nabi’s familiar street-child character in ***Tokai***, and Monirul Islam’s abstract compositions ***Let There Be Light*** and ***Blue Prism***, marked by geometric forms and delicate lines.

The exhibition also features Farida Zaman’s ***Sufia***, Rokeya Sultana’s ***Time and Madonna*** and ***Flaming Desires***, and Kanak Chanpa Chakma’s ***Ritual*** and ***The Bell***, drawing on themes of identity, motherhood and indigenous heritage.





Vinita Karim’s ***The Crimson Hour*** and ***Emerald Tide*** bring together acrylic, embroidery, gold and copper on linen, while Nazia Andaleeb Preema’s ***Surreal Night*** and ***Dancing Spring*** offer contrasting explorations of colour and form.

The occasion also marks a significant moment for DD Art Gallery, which was established in 1999 by art collector and curator Rizwan Bin Farouq. With its new space, the gallery aims to bring artists, collectors and art enthusiasts closer together while expanding its reach through a digital platform.

Among the dignitaries named in the exhibition catalogue are Finance and Planning Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury as chief guest, artist Monirul Islam as special guest, and Dhaka Bank Chairman Abdul Hai Sarkar as guest of honour.

DD Art Gallery’s continuing effort is to create a space where art is not standing on the sidelines. Instead, it is bringing together different generations of artists and opening new conversations about the place of art in Bangladesh. The exhibition is open for visitors at DD Art Gallery’s new premises on the fifth floor of House 61, Road 27, Gulshan-1, Dhaka until December 3, daily from 3 pm to 8 pm.

NEWS

Bangladesh eyes financing options amid rising debt

FROM PAGE 12

The ratio is estimated to have increased to 40.5 percent in fiscal 2025-26 from 38.9 percent the previous year, and is projected to reach 43 percent this fiscal year.

According to the global lender, the projected increase reflects growing expenditure on public sector salaries and pensions, subsidies, capital support for troubled banks and debt servicing, against a backdrop of weak revenue growth.

“Public debt continued to rise, posing risks to debt sustainability,” said the Washington-based multilateral lender in its latest development update released last month.

In this context, the conference will open with a scene-setting keynote exploring the fundamental rationale for sovereign borrowing, specifically how public debt, when managed prudently within a strong fiscal policy environment, can finance productive investment, boost job creation and productivity, and accelerate growth alongside sovereign debt management challenges.

The event aims to examine sustainable borrowing strategies and appropriate cost-risk trade-offs in a high-interest-rate environment.

The opening session will examine empirical evidence on the relationship between expansionary fiscal policy, public investment and economic growth; how economic cycles can be weathered sustainably; and when borrowing enhances development versus when it crowds out private investment or becomes fiscally destabilising.

It will also draw lessons for LDC-graduating economies as they expand market access and diversify their creditor base.

A dedicated session on the new IMF Debt Sustainability Framework (DSA) for low-income countries will assess its methodology, risk thresholds and policy implications for LDC-graduating economies preparing to access international capital markets for the first time.

Discussions will focus on how the updated framework differs from the old DSA, where Bangladesh currently stands regarding calibrated risk thresholds and what policy adjustments can maintain a favourable debt profile.

The event also aims to strengthen Bangladesh’s domestic government securities market and explore opportunities for attracting international portfolio investors, explore opportunities for mobilising private capital for public investment through blended finance and risk-sharing arrangements.

It also aims to promote cooperation with multilateral development banks, international investors, credit rating agencies, and peer-country debt management institutions.

Finance Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury will inaugurate the conference this morning.

One person’s reject, lifeline for another

FROM PAGE 12

“Most people in this area are financially disadvantaged -- they cannot afford to buy vegetables at regular market prices. That is why these cheaper vegetables are in high demand,” said Jakir Hossain, a shopkeeper at the market.

According to Jakir, several traders have been supporting their families through this business for years.

The 55-year-old Moneja Begum has been supporting herself through this trade for 22 years, ever since her husband died.

She earns between Tk 200 and Tk 400 a day by selling the spoiled produce at Fokirni Bazar, beside Tejgaon Railway Station.

For instance, on Wednesday, she bought around 100 kg of damaged cucumbers for Tk 800, which she sold for Tk 1,300 over Wednesday and Thursday. She still had 10kg remaining.

“That is how I manage to run my household,” she said.

Several customers at the market said they came there because the vegetables were considerably cheaper than those sold in regular markets.

Vegetables are cut and prepared before cooking anyway, so minor damage or cracks do not necessarily make them unusable. What matters is being able to buy them at an affordable price.

A significant portion of the vegetables is also purchased by small hotels and messes, helping them reduce food costs.

Karwan Bazar, one of Dhaka’s largest wholesale markets, also has a separate section where broken, cracked and stale vegetables are sold.

Around 30 to 35 traders operate there beside the wholesale outlets.

Their customers include small hotels, suppliers of meals to messes, and low- and middle-income households living in nearby areas.

Harun-or-Rashid, a trader at the market, said wholesale businesses often have vegetables left unsold after regular trading hours. Some vegetables are also damaged or cracked during transportation.

Others become stale after remaining unsold for two or three days.

“The wholesale traders sell these vegetables at reduced prices. We buy them and then sell them to customers at even lower prices,” he said.

Saifur Rahman Chowdhury Sujon, general secretary of the Karwan Bazar Wholesale Traders Association, estimated that around five to eight percent of the vegetables arriving at the market suffer some form of damage.

Giving an example, he said a consignment of eggplants worth Tk 1,000 might have to be sold for Tk 200 or Tk 300 if some of the vegetables are cracked, broken or partially rotten.

Microsoft announces service ‘restored’

AFP, *Washington*

Tech giant Microsoft said yesterday it has “restored service” to customers, effectively drawing a close to a massive outage that caused chaos and disrupted public services and business around the world.

“We have completed our efforts to address the underlying issue of the incident and restored service to the remaining impacted customers and regions,” the US-based company said in an X post.

Microsoft had already reported a “broad recovery” for Outlook email and other services the day before, stating the major disruption was due to a technical issue and “not related to cyber or AI/ agents.”

Woman stranded in no-man’s land for five days

FROM PAGE 12

while the BGB has not allowed her to enter Bangladesh.

The woman has been spending her days and nights in the open since Tuesday, resting on straw and dry leaves. Locals have been providing her with food and drinking water.

“She has been suffering under the scorching sun for five days. She appears to be mentally unstable. The standoff between the two forces has only worsened her condition,” said Abdur Rahim, a resident of the area.

Another local, Amena Begum, said, “We hope senior officials from both countries will resolve the issue soon. She is facing serious difficulties, including using the toilet. Whenever she moves in either direction, personnel from the two border forces chase her away.”

As of yesterday afternoon, the two forces had remained in contact, but no solution had been reached.

Lt Col Hasanur Rahman, commanding officer of the Jamalpur-35 BGB Battalion, said the woman had been unable to provide a specific address and gave only fragmentary information, making communication difficult.

He said the BSF claims the woman is a Bangladeshi citizen, while the BGB maintains that she was pushed into Bangladesh from India and has evidence to support that claim.

The woman has been spending her days and nights in the open since Tuesday, resting on straw and dry leaves.

Efforts are under way to persuade the BSF to take her back, he said, adding that discussions are continuing at both field and higher levels.





Passengers watch departure flight screens at Chicago O'Hare International Airport in Chicago. US aviation regulators issued an extremely rare ground stop of all flights across the country on Friday after a major communications outage, which the Department of Homeland Security said did not appear to be the result of any "nefarious attack".

PHOTO: AFP

Thousands of US flights cancelled, delayed in longest shutdown since 9/11

REUTERS, *Washington*

Airlines cancelled 4,500 US flights and delayed 4,400 more yesterday as the United States struggled to recover from the longest nationwide flight shutdown since the September 11, 2001, attacks.

Federal Aviation Administration head Bryan Bedford apologised for the disruption, saying the system was stable and he expected airline operations to largely return to normal by today.

The FAA issued a nationwide ground stop on Friday that halted nearly all departing flights for almost five hours due to a massive communications failure, which forced airlines to cancel nearly 10,000 flights and delay more than 7,000 others on Friday in one of the worst travel days in US history.

The issue prompted the White House to convene an emergency meeting in the Situation Room on Friday and federal agencies to scramble to determine if it was a cyberattack. Instead, Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy said yesterday that FAA contractor L3Harris' LHX.N installation of at least one new router at a remote facility triggered the disruption.

"We're working to determine whether we had incompetence, meaning was it user error or installer error from L3Harris, or did they install a faulty router? We haven't determined what the fault was," Duffy said at a press conference.

L3Harris did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Its shares last traded down about 4% after hours on Friday.

The issue led to data overloading other communication centres. "We had over 1,000 connection attempts every four to five seconds, and what that did was (it) gave us issues with our communication with airplanes, and it also caused some disruption with our radar," Duffy added.

The issue affected communications at 17 of 22 en route centres — the FAA facilities that control aircraft during the cruise portion of a flight — across the country. Bedford said the FAA ordered the ground stop in case a centre lost total communications. "No facilities went dark. Nothing was fully lost," Bedford added.

The FAA said it was doing additional testing with L3Harris to see if there are any additional risks.

Delta Air Lines DAL.N, United Airlines UAL.O and American Airlines AAL.O all cancelled about 20% of their flights yesterday, while JetBlue JBLU.O cancelled 40%. Airlines have issued travel waivers allowing passengers to rebook flights for later dates without cost.

Though the FAA lifted the ground stop on Friday evening, the disruption for passengers was far from over, with tens of thousands of people stranded in airports. Airlines were trying to get flight crews and other personnel in position to resume flights.

The disruption stranded some college football teams on Friday before games scheduled for yesterday.

The FAA issued the ground stop because of an outage that appeared to affect a network that handles critical radio frequencies used by air traffic controllers to communicate with pilots, according to two airline officials. L3Harris oversees the network.

Friday's disruption is the latest and most dramatic sign of strain on a US air traffic control system beset by aging technology, equipment and communications problems and a shortage of several thousand controllers.

Two more die with measles-like symptoms

UNB, *Dhaka*

Two more children died with measles-like symptoms in the 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, taking the combined number of confirmed and suspected measles-related deaths to 1,306 this year.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), both deaths were classified as suspected, taking the suspected death toll to 1,201. Confirmed measles deaths remained unchanged at 105.

During the period, 1,084 new suspected cases and 83 confirmed cases were reported, taking the respective tallies to 246,646 and 25,111.

Since March 15, a total of 220,247 suspected measles patients have been hospitalised across the country, of whom 211,303 have recovered, DGHS data showed.

Four journos sent to jail in Tangail extortion case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Tangail*

A Tangail court sent four local journalists to jail yesterday after they were arrested in an extortion case filed in Sakhipur upazila.

Judicial Magistrate Jannatul Naim Mitu passed the order after police produced the accused before the court, said Court Inspector Md Lutfor Rahman.

The accused are Abdur Razzak Sujan, Sakhipur-Kalihati correspondent of NTV Online; Morshed Khan, Sakhipur correspondent of the Daily Manabkantha; Sheikh Monir, online in-charge of local weekly Sakhipur Barta; and Sanim Miah, an assistant to Sujan.

Fazlur Rahman Fazlu, joint general secretary of the Dariyapur union unit of BNP and president of the Sakhipur Upazila Merchants' Association, filed the case yesterday.

Locals detained the four in Deobari on Friday night and handed them over to police. They were shown arrested after the filing of the case.

While being escorted to the court, the accused journalists told fellow journalists that they had been framed after recording videos of some locals who were allegedly consuming drugs. They claimed that, after they refused hush money, Tk 8,000 was forcibly placed in one of their pockets to implicate them in an extortion case.

Meanwhile, Fazlu said he had filed the case at the request of villagers.

Sakhipur Police Station OC Murad Hossain said the case involved allegations of extortion. Police will submit a report after further investigation.

Gangs shake down 3 neighbourhoods

FROM PAGE 12

Tk 1 lakh a month to keep their businesses running. They alleged that the collectors, operating in Emon's name, were now demanding an increase in the monthly payment. Traders in Rayerbazar's Banshpatti area said extortionists generally spared smaller shops. Major businesses now fear violent reprisals if they refuse to pay.

The extortion racket has also extended to property transactions, with both buyers and sellers forced to pay substantial sums whenever land or buildings change hands. Those who refuse face difficulties completing transactions or taking possession of their properties.

Building demolition contractors in the area reported similar intimidation. One contractor said he had secured a Tk 20 lakh demolition contract but was asked to pay Tk 5 lakh in extortion. After negotiations, he was forced to pay Tk 3 lakh. During the demolition work, men also took away construction rods worth Tk 50,000, Tk 1 lakh and Tk 1.5 lakh in three separate incidents, he alleged.

He said repeated extortion and theft of materials made it nearly impossible for contractors to accurately estimate costs and avoid heavy losses.

Meanwhile, repeated attacks on AJR Courier Service vehicles have left drivers and staff fearing for their lives.

Jayanta Chowdhury, assistant general manager of AJR Courier Service, told The Daily Star that the company's vehicles had been attacked at least 12 times in the capital since October 20, leaving six drivers injured. Several cases have been filed over the attacks.

The latest attack took place at 9:30pm on November 5, when an AJR covered van was intercepted in front of the Rayerbazar wholesale market and set ablaze.

Witnesses and company employees said 10 to 12 men on motorcycles vandalised the vehicle before throwing petrol bombs at it. Customers' goods and important documents belonging to various organisations were destroyed in the fire. The company initially estimated losses at Tk 1 crore to Tk 1.5 crore.

During a visit to the company's depot behind Sikder Medical College on Saturday, several vehicles were seen parked there. A mini pickup had extensive burn damage to its cabin and engine compartment. A company official said the vehicles had also been attacked and torched on November 5.

"The driver was severely beaten, and the attackers allegedly tried to burn him alive inside the vehicle. He remains hospitalised. "Two other drivers from this depot were also injured in separate attacks," the official added.

An AJR driver told The Daily Star, "We cannot drive our vehicles anywhere safely. There is no guarantee of when or where we will come under attack. Even returning home after duty has become frightening."

An official at the depot said the company operated more than 500 vehicles, mostly pickups, nationwide. "The continuing violence threatens to severely disrupt nationwide delivery operations," he said. He said police had contacted the company and offered assurances, but effective measures on the ground were urgently needed.

Sheikh Jahidul Islam, deputy commissioner of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police's Ramna Division, told The Daily Star that police were trying to arrest Emon but had yet to trace him. He said police were in regular contact with AJR authorities and had taken measures to protect the company's vehicles.

Involve retired officials in cleanliness drives in Dhaka

FROM PAGE 3

country. Committees will be formed at the neighbourhood level, where they will serve as advisers or take responsible positions. We also want to involve young people alongside them," he said.

The retired officials and young volunteers will work with government officials to raise awareness about dengue prevention, waste disposal, keeping footpaths clear, drainage and household waste management.

Shahe Alam said the government had launched several cleanliness initiatives in Dhaka and other metropolitan cities, with committees involving different ministries and agencies beginning work on October 27.

To monitor cleanliness activities in Dhaka, 20 committees were formed around the regional offices of the two city corporations, each headed by a PMO director.

The committees include city corporation officials, executive magistrates, engineers, representatives from RAJUK, education and health authorities, Dhaka WASA and metropolitan police.

So far, the committees have visited 248 educational institutions, 129 government and private hospitals and clinics, 112 government residential quarters, 152 markets and shopping complexes, and 188 roads, parks, footpaths and public spaces.

Teachers were asked to raise awareness among students about cleanliness and tree plantation.

Shahe Alam said the premier also directed the authorities to establish more secondary transfer stations for household waste.

The meeting also decided that government accommodation allocations could be cancelled if residents failed to maintain proper waste management and hygienic conditions.

Shahe Alam said the committees had reported a shortage of cleaning workers in Dhaka.

The ministry has already approved recruitment of 2,000 workers for Dhaka South City Corporation and 1,500 for Dhaka North City Corporation, he added.

Dinesh Chandra championed

FROM PAGE 3

Haque said Sen challenged this bias through extensive field research. While serving as headmaster of Victoria School in Cumilla in the 1890s, Sen travelled across Cumilla, Dhaka, and Chattogram to collect Bangla and Sanskrit manuscripts.

His research led to the publication of "Bangabhasha O Sahitya", a pioneering history of Bangla language and literature based on primary sources.

Sen also championed rural folk traditions despite criticism from Kolkata intellectuals, who questioned his interest in songs popular among Muslim and peasant communities.

Folk researcher Saymon Zakaria said Sen's "Maimansingha Gitika", published over a century ago, remains a cornerstone of Bangalee cultural identity.

Although Sen brought rural ballads to global attention, his reliance on secondary collectors and editorial standardisation raised questions about the gap between printed texts and evolving oral traditions.

"Dinesh Chandra Sen never conducted field research himself, which remains the primary ethnographic criticism of his work," Zakaria said, adding, "Sen nevertheless deserves credit for preserving the ballads and introducing them to wider audiences."

Zakaria stressed that contemporary researchers must engage directly with folk performers to understand evolving oral traditions.

Debkanya Sen, Sen's great-granddaughter, recalled how her family, alongside poet Jasimuddin, championed communal harmony and cultural unity across borders.

She said her great-grandfather considered Jasimuddin's poetry even more sacred than the Vedas for its message of humanity beyond religious boundaries.

"There were no barriers between Hindus and Muslims for our grandfather, and there are none among us today," she said.

Itihas Adda Coordinator Shamsuddoza Sajen also spoke.

The event was moderated by The Daily Star's Emran Mahfuz.

Local govt sidelined in urban planning

FROM PAGE 3

consultation under pressure from real estate and industrial interests.

Citing the Oxford Economics Global Cities Index 2026, he said Dhaka ranked 515th among 1,000 cities, scoring 40.3 out of 100, while Mymensingh scored 18.7.

He criticised development authorities for approving high-rise buildings without consulting city corporations or residents, putting additional pressure on roads, utilities and public services.

Adil proposed ward-level and town-level coordination teams representing different social groups and institutional reforms to strengthen local governments.

Dhaka South City Corporation's chief urban planner Nazrul Islam called for ward-based action plans backed by databases of roads, drainage systems, footpaths and other infrastructure.

Development activities should be carried out through local government institutions under a single, realistic master plan prioritising public interests, he added.

Presenting the keynote paper, Md Nurullah, urban planner and former DSCC chief engineer, said the Local Government Division had only 90 staff members to oversee 5,479 local government institutions, while more than half of approved municipal posts remained vacant.

He proposed a National Physical or Spatial Planning Council chaired by the prime minister, a modern urban and rural planning law, and planning departments staffed by urban planners and geographic information system (GIS) specialists.

The dialogue was chaired by UDJFB President Matin Abdullah and moderated by General Secretary Hasan Imon.

Five journalists received the Best Urban Reporting Award 2026: Mostafizur Rahman of Dhaka Mail, Md Zahidul Islam of Kaler Kantho, Latiful Islam of Asia Post, Rashedul Hasan of Daily Sun and Gias Uddin Sajib of Channel 24.

The sixth edition of the magazine Dhakai was also unveiled.

Ex-BDR member's body found on Indian side of

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The OC said there were injury marks on the forehead and nose of the victim. The exact cause of his death can be known after autopsy.

He said the body had been recovered and sent to Khagrachhari District Sadar Hospital for autopsy.

Lt Col Md Ahsan Ul Islam, commander of BGB-43 Ramgarh Battalion, said BGB would take necessary steps in the matter in accordance with international border regulations.

Locals and family said Angthepru, a resident of the Fenir Kul area near the Ramgarh border, left home around 2:00pm Friday to collect grass for cattle. When he did not return home by 9:30pm Friday, his family members started searching for him.

His son, Thoi Angya Marma, said they searched everywhere but failed to locate him. Around 10:00pm Friday, they informed the BGB at the local Border Outpost (BOP). Subsequently, BGB also conducted a search.

Thoi Angya said they resumed the search early today with the help of villagers. At around 8:30am yesterday, they spotted a sack of grass near the Feni riverbank in the Fenir Kul border area. While searching the surrounding area, they found the body submerged in water on the Indian side of the river. He added that there were injury marks on his father's forehead, which was still bleeding at the time.

Meanwhile, after receiving information, BGB and police personnel went to the scene near boundary pillar № 2214/18-S. However, before their arrival, family members had already recovered the body from the other side of the river and brought it back to Bangladesh.

After preparing an inquest report, police took the body to the police station around 10:00am.

Proposed cyber law could stifle govt criticism

FROM PAGE 3

Syed Abdal Ahmed, principal information officer at the Press Information Department under the information ministry, said people had faced harassment under the DSA and ICT Act.

He hoped the new cybersecurity law would not be used to suppress freedom of expression.

Sathi Akhter, arrested on October 26 after posting a video on social media saying, "I am now a victim after I voted for the BNP government", said she was detained simply for expressing her views following an alleged attack on her business establishment.

Shafiqul Alam, editor-in-chief of The Daily Waadaa, called for legal measures meeting international standards to prevent online character assassination, defamation and fabricated information while protecting freedom of expression.

New Age Deputy Editor Shahiduzzaman said democracy could not function without freedom of thought, expression and the media.

Free and fair elections alone could not ensure democracy, as people also needed access to information to make informed decisions, he added.

Lawmakers, journalists and rights activists attended the discussion, presided over by Odhikar Director ASM Nasiruddin Elan.

NCP lawmaker Abdullah Al Amin also spoke.

At the start of the event, Taskin Fahmina, advocacy director of Odhikar, presented a report prepared by the organisation.

80% of new healthcare workers to be women

FROM PAGE 3

anniversary of the Institute for Developing Science and Health Initiatives (ideSHi) at a hotel in the capital.

Zubaida said millions of women in more than 90,000 villages across the country suffered from preventable illnesses, partly due to years of neglect of preventive healthcare.

The workers would raise awareness and deliver preventive services at the community level, she said, stressing the importance of research, testing and public trust in improving healthcare.

Dr Firdausi Qadri, eminent scientist and founder of ideSHi, said the institute worked on public health issues, including thalassaemia, cancer detection and genetic disorders, particularly inborn errors of metabolism.

Dr SM Ziauddin Hyder, special assistant to the prime minister on health affairs, said research, science, technology and innovation must be central to healthcare reforms.

He identified five priorities: disease prevention, stronger primary healthcare, pharmaceutical innovation, digital health and a sustainable research and development ecosystem.

ideSHi Chairman Ashfaq Qadri delivered the welcome address, while Abdul Muktadir, chairman and managing director of Incepta Pharmaceuticals Ltd, also spoke.

Legal gaps hinder justice for custodial torture victims

FROM PAGE 3

agencies are taking advantage of this legal gap to get acquitted."

Rights activist Nur Khan Liton called for measures to ensure detainees were not subjected to torture. He suggested installing CCTV cameras in lockups and independent third-party monitoring of detainees before they were taken into law enforcers' custody.

ASK lawyer Md Shahinuzzaman said 194 incidents of custodial torture and death were recorded between 2021 and September 2026.

He said victims and their families often feared taking legal action against law enforcement agencies and other state forces.

Evidence collection was difficult and risky, while poor cooperation from forensic departments and investigation delays further complicated the process.

"Although investigation committees had been formed in most cases, their impartiality remained in question."

Supreme Court lawyer Molla Md Khalekuzzaman called for a special High Court bench to handle public interest litigation (PIL).

SC lawyer Asaduzzaman Babu said he had witnessed prison staff torturing inmates during his imprisonment and called for PILs over such incidents.

SC lawyer Probhat Tudu called for coordinated efforts, dedicated funding and a monitoring mechanism for PILs.

Imtiaz Hossain Rocky, younger brother of garment-waste trader Ishtiaque Hossain Jonny, who was tortured to death in police custody in 2014, recounted his family's struggle for justice.

He said two police informants were acquitted due to gaps in the law.

ASK Executive Director Tahmina Rahman delivered the welcome address, while its Chairperson ZI Khan Panna, a senior SC lawyer, chaired the discussion.

FROM SYLHET TO THE WORLD

Bangladesh's contribution to maternal and newborn health



PROF ABDULLAH H BAQUI



More than a decade ago, 3,000 pregnant women in Sylhet joined a study that followed them through pregnancy and childbirth. They gave blood and other samples and shared information about their health and their babies. Their contributions built a resource that is helping explain why babies are born too soon or too small, why some are stillborn, and why mothers develop complications.

A biobank stores biological samples linked to health information. Its value grows as science advances: blood collected years ago can now be examined using tools once unavailable or unaffordable. Because samples were collected before pregnancy outcomes were known, researchers can look for early warning signs and clues to how complications develop.

This is especially valuable in low- and middle-income countries, where pregnancy complications are most common, but research resources are limited. Studying local populations helps ensure that future tests and treatments address the needs of women and babies at greatest risk.

The Sylhet study was part of the Alliance for Maternal and Newborn Health Improvement (AMANHI), supported by the Gates Foundation and coordinated by the World Health Organization. Johns Hopkins University led the Bangladesh study with Bangladeshi partners through the Projahnmo research platform. The samples and linked data are housed at Projahnmo Research Foundation, with duplicate samples at North South University for safekeeping.

Similar AMANHI biobanks in Pakistan and Tanzania used common methods, allowing comparisons across populations. AMANHI helped lay the foundation for the Multi-Omics for Mothers and Infants (MOMI) Consortium, covering more than 24,000 pregnancies across South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Researchers study proteins, nutrients, and other substances together to understand pregnancy complications.

Early findings are encouraging. Two blood proteins shown to help predict premature birth in the United States also helped identify women at higher risk in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Tanzania. Adding other proteins improved prediction, suggesting that some warning signs may be shared across populations. Another study found lower levels of a blood fat involved in placental development and fetal growth among women whose babies were later born smaller than expected, offering clues about poor growth in the womb. These findings need confirmation before they can become routine tests. MOMI enables researchers to check whether discoveries hold across populations, with the goal of detecting risks early enough to prevent complications or improve treatment.

Behind every sample are years of work by Bangladeshi researchers and staff, and the trust of participating families. Preserving this resource requires reliable storage, ethical oversight, and investment in local scientific leadership. Young researchers need opportunities to develop laboratory and data analysis skills. International partnerships should strengthen these skills, support shared leadership, and ensure that samples and data are used responsibly for public benefit.

Bangladesh should take pride in this contribution and invest in its future so that discoveries lead to better health and save the lives of mothers and babies worldwide.

The writer is a Professor of International Health at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and Director of the International Center for Maternal and Newborn Health at Johns Hopkins University. He also founded the Projahnmo Research Foundation in Bangladesh. E-mail: abaqui@jhu.edu

Barbados stops HIV passing from mothers to babies: Lessons for Bangladesh

A baby born free from HIV is no longer just a hope in Barbados. It is now a remarkable public health achievement, offering valuable lessons for Bangladesh.

On 30 October 2026, the World Health Organisation (WHO) announced that Barbados had eliminated mother-to-child transmission of HIV as a public health problem.

Between 2022 and 2024, the Caribbean nation reported no new HIV infections passed from mothers to newborns. The secret? Accessible healthcare, early testing and timely treatment.

An impressive 98 per cent of pregnant women received pregnancy care, 98 per cent underwent HIV testing, and 98 per cent of expectant mothers living with HIV received treatment.

Crucially, Barbados provides free HIV testing and treatment to pregnant women, regardless of nationality, while protecting their privacy and dignity.

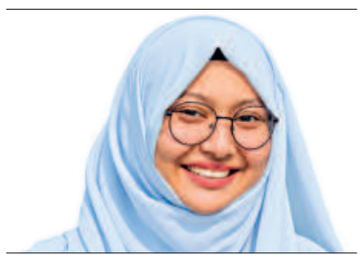
For Bangladesh, the message is powerful. Strengthening routine HIV screening during pregnancy, ensuring uninterrupted treatment and reaching mothers in rural and underserved communities could prevent avoidable infections.

Equally important is tackling stigma, which often discourages women from seeking help. Barbados demonstrates that protecting newborns requires more than medicine. It demands political commitment, affordable services and compassionate care.

Every child deserves a healthy beginning. Bangladesh can turn that promise into reality through sustained investment and action.



The forgotten health struggles of Dhaka's Bihari community



HASANAH FARHAT

In the heart of Dhaka, where hospitals, pharmacies and clinics seem to be everywhere, some communities still struggle to access even the most basic healthcare. For families living in the Bihari camp in Kalshi, Mirpur 12, falling ill can mean choosing between buying medicine and putting food on the table.

For decades, the largely Urdu-speaking Bihari community has faced social and economic hardship. Although many residents gained Bangladeshi citizenship following a landmark court ruling in 2008, access to healthcare, clean water, proper housing and stable employment remains a daily struggle.



A resident explained the difficulties families face during emergencies, particularly at night when they need medicine. But the challenges extend far beyond medicine.

Overcrowded homes, inadequate sanitation and unreliable water supplies create conditions where illness can spread easily. Residents often queue for water, making something as simple as maintaining personal hygiene an exhausting daily task.

For families surviving on low wages or irregular earnings, seeking treatment presents another dilemma. Transport costs, consultation fees and medicines can quickly become unaffordable. Missing work because of illness means losing precious income, pushing households further into financial insecurity.

The consequences are particularly concerning for children, older people and those requiring regular medical attention. When healthcare is delayed because of financial hardship, manageable illnesses may become more serious.

Occasional charitable assistance offers temporary relief, but residents need lasting solutions rather than short-lived promises.

Affordable neighbourhood accessible clinics, safe drinking water and improved sanitation could significantly ease their difficulties. Better housing, education and employment opportunities are equally important because good health begins long before someone enters a hospital.

The situation in Kalshi raises an uncomfortable question: What does healthcare access truly mean when the people who need it the most cannot afford to reach it?

For Bangladesh, ensuring healthcare for marginalised communities is not merely about building more hospitals. It is about creating a society where someone's address, income or background does not determine their chance of living a healthy life.

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Dhaka, let's go outside: Three days of wellness, music and mindfulness

In a city where traffic, deadlines and endless screen time often leave little room to breathe, Dhaka residents were invited to rediscover wellbeing beneath the open sky.

The Flow Fest returned for its fifth edition with Winter Wellness, a three-day celebration from November 12–14 at Fortis Platinum Lounge in Jolshiri.

Founded by Shazia Omar, the Bangladesh-born wellness initiative aims to make healthier living accessible beyond expensive gyms and exclusive retreats.

Under the campaign "Dhaka, let's go outside", visitors explored yoga, meditation, dance, martial arts, fitness challenges and discussions on mental health, nutrition, women's wellbeing and workplace stress.

Beyond exercise, the festival offered live music, storytelling, children's activities, poetry, creative workshops and a vibrant marketplace featuring local businesses.

Visitors enjoyed picnics, horseback riding and outdoor activities while discovering simple ways to incorporate relaxation, movement and meaningful connections into everyday life.

Shazia believes seeking help should be recognised as courage rather than weakness, while wellbeing should be a way of life, not a luxury.

For Dhaka's weary residents, this was a refreshing reminder that wellbeing sometimes begins by simply stepping outside.

When parents' stress becomes a child's burden



AISHI DASTIDAR

In Bangladesh, examination season often turns homes into pressure cookers. As school finals and admission tests approach, children are not the only ones losing sleep. Parents, anxious about grades, competition and prestigious schools, may unknowingly pass their worries on to their children.

What begins as concern for a child's future can gradually become a source of fear.

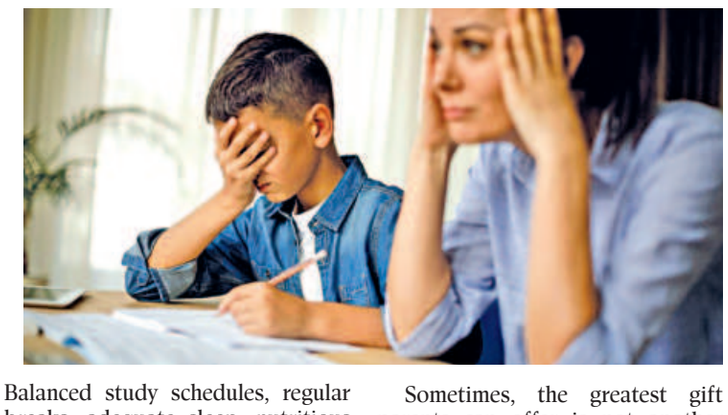
For many children, examinations no longer feel like opportunities to demonstrate learning. Instead, they become tests of whether they are good enough to earn parental approval.

Constant reminders to study, comparisons with classmates and disappointment over marks can quietly damage a child's confidence. A child appearing lazy or distracted may actually be frightened, exhausted or overwhelmed.

Parents rarely intend to cause harm. Their anxiety often comes from genuine love and the belief that academic success guarantees a secure future. Yet good intentions do not always produce healthy outcomes.

The answer is not abandoning expectations but replacing pressure with encouragement.

A calm conversation can achieve more than repeated criticism.



Balanced study schedules, regular breaks, adequate sleep, nutritious meals and time for recreation help children remain focused without feeling trapped.

Parents should also remember that admission to a renowned school does not guarantee happiness, confidence or future success. Similarly, disappointing examination results reveal areas needing support, not a child's worth.

Most importantly, children must know that parental love is not conditional upon academic achievement.

Sometimes, the greatest gift parents can offer is not another study guide, but a peaceful home where mistakes are allowed and encouragement comes before expectations.

The writer is a Stress Management Coach. Email: aadastidar08@gmail.com

POST-MEAL WALKING

The simplest health habit you are overlooking



What if one of the easiest ways to improve your health begins just after putting down your dinner plate?

In Bangladesh, where rice dominates meals and sitting down afterwards is common, a short walk could make a surprising difference.

Research suggests that walking for just two to five minutes after eating can help prevent sharp rises in blood sugar. When we move, our muscles use some of the sugar circulating in our blood, helping the body manage it more effectively.

A 2022 review published in the journal Sports Medicine found that light walking after meals improved blood sugar levels compared with prolonged sitting.

The benefits extend beyond blood sugar. Gentle movement may ease feelings of fullness, support digestion and help people break long periods of inactivity.

The best part? No gym membership, expensive equipment or exhausting workout is required.

Walk around your home, take a stroll along the corridor or step outside after lunch. Even five to ten minutes can be worthwhile. Aim for a comfortable pace rather than vigorous exercise immediately after eating.

For people managing diabetes, regular post-meal walks can complement, but never replace, prescribed treatment.

Sometimes, better health does not demand dramatic changes. It simply asks us to take a few steps.

DHAKA SUNDAY NOVEMBER 15, 2026, KARTIK 30, 1433 BS

SPORT



"I want to have a great day. I'm happy to be here for the start of this wonderful story. The president dreams of something big for Ravenna, and being a part of it makes me happy."

Ronaldinho on his return to professional football



Hamza Choudhury holds his head in anguish after Bangladesh's 1-0 defeat against Pakistan in the SAFF Championship semifinal at the National Stadium in Dhaka yesterday. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Bangladesh's familiar failure

TANVIR AHMED PRANTO

The flares were burning, the players were crumbling and Bangladesh's latest shot at glory was going up in smoke. As the National Stadium descended into chaos on Saturday night, youngsters Zayyan Ahmed and Farhaan Ali Wahid wept on the touchline. Bangladesh had found another way to fall short when it mattered most.

A 1-0 semifinal defeat to Pakistan extended their title drought and denied them a first final appearance in the SAFF Championship since 2005. Abdul Samad Shahzad's 86th-minute strike, slipping through goalkeeper Mehedi Hasan Srabon's hands settled the contest, after the goalkeeper's ill-advised and ill-directed attempt at launching a counter-attack spectacularly backfired. But Srabon's error was only the final blow in a performance riddled with deeper failures.

Bangladesh had frozen long before that. Against a Pakistan side whose domestic league has not completed a season since 2018-19, the hosts looked short of composure, accuracy and ideas. Their tentative passing and predictable build-up bore little resemblance to the side that had swept aside Sri Lanka 4-0.

Head coach Thomas Dooley admitted his players never settled under the weight of expectation.

"We had to win this game against Pakistan. But we didn't come into the game," he said, explaining how early mistakes bred nervousness and disrupted their passing.

Pakistan, meanwhile, looked more assured. Dooley conceded they had "a little bit more knowledge about football, when to run, how to run, how to touch the ball, how to pass the ball". It was a damning assessment of the technical gap exposed on home soil.

The second-half switch that put Rakib Hossain and Shuki Itofusa on opposite flanks briefly offered hope, but Shuki's cramps stalled the momentum. Dooley also questioned his players' physical readiness, pointing to Pakistan's extra recovery days and the number of Bangladesh players who cramped up.

Yet fatigue was only part of the problem. Bangladesh lacked a convincing attacking plan, and Dooley's explanation for keeping an exhausted Farhaan on the pitch was hardly reassuring.

"With Farhaan, even if he is tired, we are always looking for him... that he might have that lucky shot," he said.

A team chasing a place in the final needed a way to create chances, not a prayer for individual brilliance.

Dooley's defence of Srabon raised another concern. Protecting a young goalkeeper after a costly mistake was understandable. Suggesting the other two keepers might have made the same error was not.

"Any other goalkeeper would have done maybe the same thing in the same situation," he said. A coach must prepare players for pressure, not make failure under it sound inevitable.

The disorder outside the gates before kick-off and the flares thrown onto the pitch after the goal offered an ugly backdrop. Hamza Choudhury's arrival and the diaspora recruits had fuelled hopes, but star power and crowd enthusiasm cannot conceal structural shortcomings.

Zayyan and Farhaan's tears captured the heartbreak. The harder question is what Bangladesh will learn from it. Until ambition is matched by composure, fitness and tactical conviction, the familiar failure will return.

Batting key to ending Proteas jinx

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's batting will be under the microscope when the visitors face South Africa in the opening Test of the two-match series at Johannesburg's Wanderers Stadium today.

Despite a formidable pace attack that has brought them success at home and abroad -- most recently in Darwin against Australia a few months ago -- the Tigers remain vulnerable with the bat.

Their recent 1-0 home series defeat to West Indies exposed the problem. Bangladesh were bowled out for 272 and 142 in Mirpur, losing the first Test by nine wickets, while Tawhid Hridoy's unbeaten 242 and 82 in Sylhet helped them salvage a draw in the second.

Skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto said in the pre-match presser that Bangladesh were considering an extra batter but had yet to decide between that option and a second spinner, with the pitch likely to dictate the final combination.

He reckons that "three pacers will definitely be in the team" alongside a spinner in Bangladesh's maiden Test at the Wanderers, with Mehidy Hasan Miraz's recent performances in Australia strengthening the case for spin.

Shanto said the entire batting unit needed to deliver, particularly those who "get set at the crease". A big first-innings total, he added, would give Bangladesh's bowlers a chance to compete as the Tigers aim for their first win over the Proteas in the longest format.



- **Bangladesh are set to play a Test at Johannesburg's Wanderers Stadium for the first time.**
- **They have lost all eight Tests in South Africa, five by an innings. Overall, they have lost 14 of their 16 Tests against the Proteas, with the other two ending in rain-affected draws.**
- **The two-match series will form part of the ICC World Test Championship (WTC) cycle. Reigning champions South Africa are second in the standings with 71.43 percentage points, while Bangladesh are fifth with 45.83.**
- **Bangladesh beat Australia and New Zealand on their most recent Test tours, in 2026 and 2022 respectively. However, they are yet to win a Test away to either South Africa or England among the SENA nations.**

South Africa, meanwhile, have named four fast bowlers and a spinner in a pace-heavy eleven. Zubayr Hamza returns to address their troublesome № 3 position, while veteran pacer Dane Paterson also comes in. David Bedingham and Gerald Coetzee make way from the Proteas who beat Australia by 176 runs to clinch their preceding series 2-1.

Skipper Temba Bavuma said Hamza "scored runs in domestic cricket in all the formats" and more aggressive approach had earned him a recall. Paterson, meanwhile, offered greater variety and a different challenge for batters.

"He comes with a little bit more skill with the ball, a different kind of challenge for the batters. It's a case of who we felt was the better bowler for these conditions," Bavuma added.

Moosa hopes not to 'hate VAR' in final

SPORTS REPORTER

India coach Naushad Moosa hopes to benefit from Video Assistant Referee (VAR) decisions in the SAFF Championship final after two calls went against his side in their 2-1 win over Bhutan in the first semifinal at the National Stadium yesterday.

The defending champions led 2-0 at half-time but came under pressure after the break. Bhutan's first goal was initially ruled out for offside before the Indonesian referee overturned the decision. India were then awarded a penalty, only for the referee to reverse that call with the help of VAR. The technology, being used for the first time in the regional tournament, is operated from Thailand.

Asked about the decisions, Moosa laughed before remarking: "Somehow I didn't like it. One goal and one penalty [went against India]... I hate VAR."



Asked about the benefits of VAR for the game, Moosa struck a more positive note. "It's good, it's good... Maybe an advantage for me for the next game, hopefully," said the India coach, a member of the country's 1997 SAFF-winning team.

The victory took the nine-time champions to their 14th final in 15 editions of the tournament and their 10th in succession.

Asked about India's second-half struggles -- they conceded twice against Pakistan after leading 3-0 and also faltered against Maldives -- Moosa said his players had failed to replicate their first-half performance. "Let me take it in a positive way -- I think we defended well in the second half."





ARGENTINA, BRAZIL STUTTER

Uruguay players celebrate their 2-1 win over Argentina in an international friendly at Estadio La Bombonera in Buenos Aires yesterday, as the Albiceleste began the post-Messi era with a defeat. Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni, however, urged patience with the country's emerging talents, pointing to several positives from the game. (Inset) Meanwhile, Brazil's indifferent form continued as they suffered a 3-2 defeat to Japan in a feisty encounter in Singapore, despite a brace from Vinicius Jr. PHOTO: REUTERS

WHAT TO WATCH

T Sports
South Africa vs Bangladesh
1st Test, Day 1
Live from 2:00 pm

Sony Sports 1
New Zealand vs India
5th ODI
Live from 8:00 am

Sony Sports 2
UEFA Nations League
Belarus vs Albania
Live from 11:00 pm

Spain vs England
Live from 1:45 am (Monday)

Sony Sports 5
UEFA Nations League
Belgium vs Italy
Live from 1:45 am (Monday)







Bangladesh eyes financing options amid rising debt

Two-day int'l conference begins in Cox's Bazar

REJAUL KARIM BYRON, *from Cox's Bazar*

A two-day international debt conference begins in Cox's Bazar today to formulate sustainable debt strategies and identify the best alternative financing options, including sovereign bonds, amid Bangladesh's rising debt risks.

Organised by the finance division in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank, the conference will feature discussions on international bonds alongside the International Monetary Fund's new debt sustainability framework.

Representatives from the World Bank, the IMF and several countries -- including the US, Malaysia, Indonesia, Georgia, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka -- will join the event.

The overarching objective of the conference is to facilitate high-level policy dialogue, international knowledge exchange and professional capacity development to strengthen sovereign debt management in Bangladesh, according to finance division officials.

The conference comes at a critical juncture for Bangladesh: recent WB debt reports show that the country's outstanding foreign debt has nearly tripled over the past decade to $113.43 billion at the end of 2025.

The WB has also warned that Bangladesh's public debt-to-GDP ratio could rise to 45.2 percent by fiscal 2027-28, edging closer to the 55 percent threshold the IMF considers sustainable.

SEE PAGE 8 COL 1



Residents stand on the edge of the Meghna in Brahmanbaria's Nabinagar upazila. They say years of illegal sand lifting have made the river swallow farmlands and inch dangerously close to homes. Despite a suspension on leases, armed groups allegedly continue to extract sand near the banks. The photo was taken recently in Dharabhanga village of Barikandi union.

PHOTO: **MASUK HRIDOY**

Gangs shake down 3 neighbourhoods

Traders allege demands in top criminal Emon's name in Mohammadpur, Rayerbazar, Hazaribagh



The extortion racket has also extended to property transactions, with both buyers and sellers forced to pay substantial sums whenever land or buildings change hands.

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Businesses in Mohammadpur, Rayerbazar and Hazaribagh are increasingly alarmed by brazen extortion attempts amid a series of attacks on AJR Courier Service vehicles.

Traders alleged that extortionists operating in the name of notorious criminal Sanjidul Islam Emon have stepped up their demands, targeting large commercial establishments, property transactions and building demolition contractors.

Fears have deepened since October 20, when a group of men claiming to be Emon's associates ransacked and looted an AJR warehouse, demanding rent for the land on which it stands. Several attacks on the company's vehicles and facilities have followed.

Speaking to The Daily Star on Saturday, local traders and residents said extortion had spread across multiple sectors in the three adjacent areas.

Several traders at a poultry wholesale market in Rayerbazar, speaking on condition of anonymity, said men had been forcibly taking chickens from their shops without payment since last year.

The traders eventually agreed to pay

SEE PAGE 9 COL 4

Woman stranded in no-man's land for five days



PHOTO: **COURTESY**

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Jamalpur*

A woman remained stranded in no-man's land along the Bangladesh-India border in Jamalpur's Dewanganj upazila for a fifth consecutive day yesterday as Border Guard Bangladesh and India's Border Security Force continued to differ over her identity and nationality.

The woman, believed to be around 30, was first spotted by locals on Tuesday morning at the Pathorer Char border in Dangdhara union. Since then, she has been forced to stay at the zero line, as neither side has agreed to take responsibility for her.

According to locals and BGB officials, the woman has provided inconsistent information about her identity and address. She initially identified herself as Fuji Begum and said she was 30 years old.

BGB officials said the BSF attempted to push her into Bangladesh after she arrived at the border, but the move was prevented by BGB personnel and local residents. Since then, the BSF has refused to take her back,

SEE PAGE 8 COL 1

COST OF LIVING

One person's reject, lifeline for another

Damaged, rotting produce ends up feeding families running on a shoestring

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Vegetables discarded as unsellable at wholesale markets are being purchased by low-income families at a fraction of the regular price to keep household expenses down.

Broken cabbages, cracked bottle gourds, misshapen beans, cut eggplants, partially rotten tomatoes and potatoes with their rotten portions removed are being sold at several low-income neighbourhood markets in the capital, such as Geneva Camp in Mohammadpur and Fokirni Bazar in Nakhalpara, Tejgaon.

At Geneva Camp in Mohammadpur, there are around 30 shops at a vegetable market selling the damaged produce.

Laili Begum, 50, was found grocery shopping at the market for her family of six. She bought one kilogram of cut eggplants for Tk 20, a kg of cut potatoes for Tk 15 and around half a kg of partially spoiled tomatoes for Tk 20. Her total



expenditure was Tk 55.

The same quantity of fresh vegetables would have cost her around Tk 125, saving her approximately Tk 70. She used the money saved to buy cooking oil, spices and coarse rice for her family.

For Laili, the appearance of the vegetables is not a major concern amid a cost of living crisis, which is squeezing her authorickshaw driver husband's earnings of late.

SEE PAGE 8 COL 4



Steam rises from the cooling towers of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant in Pabna yesterday as Unit-1 undergoes testing. The country's first nuclear power plant recently received regulatory clearance to enter Stage C, paving the way for a gradual increase in reactor power, turbine testing and synchronisation with the national grid.

PHOTO: **AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU**

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার

নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলীর কার্যালয়, সওজ
সড়ক বিভাগ, বরিশাল।
ফোনঃ ০২-৪৭৮৮৩১২৫৪
e-mail: eebar@rhd.gov.bd

স্মারক নং- ৩৫.০১.০৬৫১.৪০৩.৩৬.০০১.২৬-৩৩৭১ তারিখঃ- ০৯/১১/২০২৬ খ্রিঃ।

"জরুরী গণ-বিজ্ঞপ্তি"

এতদ্বারা সংশ্লিষ্ট সকলের অবগতির জন্য জানানো যাচ্ছে যে, বরিশাল সড়ক বিভাগাধীন ঢাকা (যাত্রাবাড়ী)-মাওয়া-ভাঙ্গা-বরিশাল-পটুয়াখালী জাতীয় মহাসড়কের ১৭৩তম কিলোমিটারে বরিশাল বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় সংলগ্ন স্থানে একটি ফুটওভার ব্রিজ এর জরুরী কাজ সম্পন্ন করার জন্য আগামী ১৫/১১/২০২৬ ইং তারিখ রবিবার দিবাগত রাত ০১:০০ টা হতে রাত ০৩:০০ টা অর্থাৎ ১৬/১১/২০২৬ ইং তারিখ সোমবার প্রথম প্রহর (রাত ১:০০টা থেকে ৩:০০টা) পর্যন্ত ২ (দুই) ঘন্টা উক্ত স্থান দিয়ে সকল ধরণের যান চলাচল বন্ধ থাকবে। সরকারি জনগুরুত্বপূর্ণ কাজ সম্পাদনের স্বার্থে জনসাধারণের এ সাময়িক অসুবিধার জন্য সওজ কর্তৃপক্ষ আন্তরিকভাবে দুঃখিত।

10.11.26
(মোঃ নাজমুল ইসলাম)
পরিচিতি নং-৬০২২৩২
নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলী, সওজ
সড়ক বিভাগ, বরিশাল

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