



PM calls for ensuring time-befitting higher education to consolidate democracy

Staff Correspondent

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman today said after the restoration of democracy in the country, the next challenge is to consolidate it, and Dhaka University has an important role to play in this regard.

"Since its establishment in 1921, Dhaka University has been playing a pioneering role in expanding higher education and promoting knowledge, research and intellectual pursuits in the country," the premier said in a message issued on the

occasion of the 105th Dhaka University Day to be observed tomorrow.

The Head of the Government extended his heartfelt greetings and congratulations to teachers, students, guardians, alumni and all members of the DU family on the occasion.

He said the university's students had led all major democratic movements and struggles in Bangladesh, including the Language Movement, the Liberation War, the anti-autocracy

Continued to page 2

AZM Zahid stresses technology-based healthcare access to all patients

Staff Correspondent

Social Welfare Minister Abu Zafar Md. Zahid Hossain today stressed the need to harness modern technology to ensure the best possible healthcare services for all patients, including children, at grass-roots levels.

"Outdated ideas must be abandoned, and modern technology should be utilised to provide the highest standard of treatment for all patients, particularly children, across the country," he said.

Continued to page 2

BITAC training aligns with national industrial demand: Muktadir

Staff Correspondent

Industries, Commerce, and Textiles & Jute Minister Khandakar Abdul Muktadir today said the training programmes of the Bangladesh Industrial Technical Assistance Center (BITAC) are timely and well aligned with the country's growing demand for skilled industrial manpower.

"The government's investment in the programme is yielding significant returns by producing a skilled workforce for industry," he said.

The minister made the remarks while speaking at a ceremony to distribute certificates and appointment letters to the 20th batch of BITAC trainees in the capital.

The event was presided over by BITAC Director General Md. Firoz Uddin, while



Continued to page 2

Two more die of measles-like symptoms

Staff Correspondent

Two more patients have died from measles-like symptoms across the country in the past 24 hours, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

During the same period, 970 new suspected measles cases were reported nationwide, while 114 confirmed patients were detected, a DGHS press release said today.

The release said a total of 84,627 suspected measles patients have so far been

Continued to page 2

Govt takes various steps to ease Dhaka waterlogging

Staff Correspondent

Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives Minister Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir today said the Dhaka North and Dhaka South City Corporations are implementing a series of short- and long-term measures in a coordinated manner to permanently address the capital's longstanding waterlogging problem.

Replying to a starred tabled question from Independent lawmaker Rumeen Farhana (Brahmanbaria-2) in the Jatiya Sangsad, the minister said the Dhaka

North City Corporation (DNCC) has identified 108 waterlogging-prone hotspots and is working to provide permanent solutions.

He said DNCC has also formed 21 Quick Response Teams (QRTs) across its 10 zones to tackle waterlogging. The teams are regularly cleaning pits, catchpits, drainage lines and waterlogged areas, resulting in quicker drainage in many parts of the city.

The minister said DNCC constructed and upgraded 110.93 kilometres of roads and 105.89 kilometres of drains during the 2024-25 fiscal year. In the

current 2025-26 fiscal year, it plans to construct and improve another 115 kilometres of roads and 120 kilometres of drains.

To ensure the natural flow of canals, he said, 360 sanitation workers have been deployed for regular canal cleaning. Besides, boundaries of 29 canals and one regulating pond have been demarcated and 1,181 boundary pillars installed to prevent illegal encroachment.

Regarding the Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC), the minister said

Continued to page 2

Congratulation my Daughter



Lubaba Fakrudin Upoma successfully completed her MASTER'S degree in CYBER SECURITY with an excellent Result from the WESTLIFE University of USA

Today, my heart is filled with pride and joy as my daughter has successfully completed her Master's degree in "Cyber Security" with an excellent result. Attending her graduation ceremony in the USA and congratulating her in person was one of the most memorable and proud moments of my life as a father.

I request everyone to keep my daughter in your prayers and wish her continued success in her future endeavors. I hope to see her achieve even greater heights and make a meaningful contribution in her field. As her father, I feel truly honored and proud of her accomplishments.

Congratulations, my dear daughter! Your hard work, dedication, and perseverance have made us incredibly proud.

Police hunt Shahadat Hossain after Rome triple murder, 70 tips checked

Staff Correspondent

Police are searching for Shahadat Hossain, a 43-year-old Bangladeshi national accused of perpetrating a triple homicide in Rome's Casalotti after he reportedly vanished following the killings on Jun 26, according to Italian media outlets.

Hossain is suspected of murdering Kamal Uddin, his wife Jahan Momotaj, and their eight-year-old daughter Alowa with a cleaver in their apartment on the evening of Jun 26.

The Flying Squad has received seventy reports since releasing his photograph, but none have yielded concrete leads despite extensive verification.

Law-enforcing agencies are patrolling exit points across the country and monitoring farmhouses in the countryside surrounding Casalotti, as well as in Ciociaria.

Officers are also checking waterways, including the Tiber, as authorities have not ruled out the possibility that Hossain took his own life in the hours following the crime.

The investigation has expanded across borders, with searches being conducted primarily in England, where Hossain lived until last year and where his wife, from whom he is reportedly separated, and his children remain.

On Jun 26, the day of the massacre, Hossain had obtained a residence permit from Frosinone police headquarters.

Political Involvement Under Scrutiny
Investigators are now focusing significantly on Hossain's connections within Rome's Bangladeshi community and his prominent role within the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Bangladesh's main nationalist party.

Italian media outlet Il Messaggero says that Hossain reportedly was an active member and "joint general secretary" of the Rome section of the BNP, regularly appearing at rallies, conferences, and demonstrations.

Continued to page 20

Remittance inflow rises 17.3pc till June 29 in FY26

Staff Correspondent

Bangladesh received US\$35.44 billion in remittances during the first 364 days of fiscal year 2025-26 (July 1, 2025 to June 29, 2026), marking a 17.3 percent increase from US\$30.21 billion received during the corresponding period of the previous fiscal year. According to the latest data, expatriate Bangladeshis sent US\$100 million in remittances on June 29. During the period from June 1 to June 29, 2026, remittance inflows stood at US\$2.686 billion, compared with US\$2.707 billion received during the corresponding period of June 2025, registering a 0.8 percent year-on-year decline for the month up to June 29.

Despite the slight dip in June's monthly inflow, overall remittance earnings remained robust throughout FY2025-26, reflecting continued strong contributions from Bangladeshis working abroad. During the period from June 1 to June 29, 2026, remittance inflows stood at US\$2.686 billion, compared with US\$2.707 billion received during the corresponding period of June 2025, registering a 0.8 percent.

Continued to page 2





PM Tariq Rahman Inaugurates National Startup Showcasing and 'One Child, One Tree' Plantation Program

News Desk:

Honorable Prime Minister Tariq Rahman has inaugurated the 'National Level Startup, Science Project and Innovation Idea Showcasing' and 'Tree Plantation Launching Program', themed "The country of merit, science, initiative, and innovation—Bangladesh comes first."

On Monday afternoon (June 29, 2026), he officially launched a simultaneous tree plantation program in 29,621 secondary-level educational institutions across the country under the 'One Child, One Tree' initiative from the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Center in the capital. The Prime Minister was accompanied by his wife, Dr. Zubaida Rahman.

The event was attended by Dr. A N M Ehsanul Hoque Milan, Minister for Education and Primary & Mass Education, and Mahdi Amin, the Prime Minister's Advisor on Education and Primary & Mass Education, as special guests. The session was presided over by Abdul Khaleque, Secretary of the Secondary and Higher Education Division. The overall manage-

ment of this successful event was led by Professor Dr. Khan Moinuddin Al Mahmud Sohel, Director General of the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education.

At the same event, Prime Minister Tariq Rahman inaugurated the 'National Level Startup, Science Project and Innovation Idea Showcasing', visited various stalls, and handed over awards to the best innovators. During his speech, he emphasized the importance of fostering innovation, scientific mindedness, environmental conservation, and building a climate-conscious generation.

The Ministry of Education is implementing this program as part of the 'One Child, One Tree' initiative and the current government's electoral pledge to plant '25 crore (250 million) trees in five years' to protect the environment and enhance climate resilience. Under this plan, 5 crore (50 million) trees will be planted in schools, colleges, and madrasas across the country over the next five years. This year, one fruit-bearing, one timber, and one medicinal tree will be planted in every educational institution.

District-level employment exchanges to connect jobs, skills across Bangladesh

Staff Correspondent

The government's move to establish "Employment Exchanges" at district and upazila levels marks a major step towards creating a fair and merit-based employment system aimed at connecting job seekers with opportunities while bridging critical skill gaps.

The initiative forms part of a broader strategy to revitalize sectoral and regional economies and expand employment opportunities nationwide, according to the national budget for Fiscal Year 2026-27 (FY27).

Under the programme, Employment Exchanges will be established at both district and upazila levels, creating a localized infrastructure for job matching and skill development.

The offices will function as hubs where registered candidates will receive support for appointment to vacant positions in various organisations based on their merit and skills.

Finance Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, in his budget speech in Jatiya Sansad on June 11, underscored the government's emphasis on employment generation as a key pillar of national development.

"Based on the principle of 'We Will Work, We Will Build the Nation', the implementation of sector-based employment generation plans is one of the topmost priorities of the government," he said.

Continued to page 2

Foreign currency reserves climb above \$32b after fresh World Bank support

Staff Correspondent

Bangladesh's foreign currency reserves have climbed above \$32 billion, extending a steady recovery driven by robust remittance inflows.

At the close of business on Monday, reserves stood at \$32.47 billion under the IMF's BPM6 accounting method, Bangladesh Bank Executive Director Arief Hossain Khan said.

Bangladesh Bank Director and Assistant Spokesperson Mohammad Shahriar Siddiqui told bdnews24.com, "\$667.1 million in loans and grants from the International Development Association (IDA) has been added."

Earlier, on Jun 14, reserves crossed the \$31 billion mark after Bangladesh received \$1 billion in budget support from the Asian



The central bank says reserves were boosted after \$667.1 million in IDA loans and grants was added

Development Bank.

At the end of that day, BPM6 reserves stood at \$31.07 billion, while gross reserves reached \$35.62 billion.

The steady rise has been driven by strong remittance inflows and Bangladesh Bank's purchases of US dollars from commercial banks. Remittances reached

\$3.43 billion in May, up 15.34 percent from a year earlier.

During the first 13 days of June, expatriates sent home \$1.36 billion, taking total remittances in FY2025-26 above \$24 billion with 17 days still remaining in the fiscal year.

The central bank has also bought \$101 million from banks through auctions in June, bringing total purchases in the outgoing fiscal year to \$6.42 billion.

According to Bangladesh Bank, gross reserves crossed \$35 billion in late February for the first time in 39 months, having fallen below that level in early November 2022.

They moved above \$35.14 billion again in early May, when BPM6 reserves stood at \$29.47 billion.

Continued to page 2

ICT expected to deliver verdict in case against Hasanul Haq Inu shortly

Staff Correspondent

The International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) is set to deliver its verdict on Tuesday in the crimes against humanity case against Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) President Hasanul Haq Inu over his alleged role in the killing of six people and other offences committed during the July uprising in Kushtia.

The verdict will be pronounced at 1:30 pm by a three-member bench of ICT-2 headed by Justice Nazrul Islam Chowdhury.

The proceedings will be broadcast live by Bangladesh Television (BTV), subject to the tribunal's permission.

On May 14, after concluding final arguments from both the prosecution and the defence, the tribunal kept the case under curia advisari vult (CAV), meaning the judgment was reserved for a later date.

The prosecution was represented by Prosecutors Faruk Ahmad, Moinul Karim, Abdus Sobhan Tarafdar and others, while senior lawyer Monsurul Haque Chowdhury led the defence.

The defence presented arguments over nine days, contending that Inu was not a member of parliament during the July 2024 uprising and had no involvement in the killings in Kushtia. According to the defence, prosecution witnesses also acknowledged that Inu was not present in Kushtia when the killings took place.

Continued to page 2

Mirpur residents distressed by water crisis

Staff Correspondent

The severe water crisis has disrupted the lives of people living in Mirpur and surrounding areas of the capital. Some homes have water for a few hours, while others have no water day and night. In this situation, many have to buy water from outside to carry out daily tasks such as cooking, bathing, washing clothes, or using the toilet. Many are bringing water from distant areas, while some are going to relatives' houses.

There is a severe water crisis in Sheorapara, Mirpur, in the capital. Despite waiting for hours, the desired water is not available. Residents are facing extreme hardship. Life is being disrupted - Jayeeta RoyLast Sunday, locals gathered at Mirpur 10th roundabout and adjacent roads to protest for water. People took to the streets with buckets and



There is a severe water crisis in Sheorapara, Mirpur, in the capital. Despite waiting for hours, the desired water is not available. Residents are facing extreme hardship. Life is being disrupted

jugs to demand water. In addition, more than a hundred residents of Sheorapara blocked

the main road with buckets and bottles. They stayed there for about 20 minutes. Later,

after being assured of water by night, they left the road. People in Sheorapara,

Manipur and No. 11 areas of Mirpur are not getting water and are having to buy water at an additional cost. After the launch of the metro rail, new multi-storey buildings have been built in Sheorapara, Kazipara and its surroundings. The number of tenants and permanent residents has increased. Along with this, the demand for water has also increased. But the supply has not increased compared to the demand. Meanwhile, the crisis has become more acute due to a mechanical fault in the Bhakurta water treatment plant in Savar.

According to Dhaka WASA, about 120 million liters of water is supplied to Mirpur area from Bhakurta water treatment plant during normal times. But on June 20, there was a fault in the plant's transformer and generator. Only 70 million liters of water were available that day.

Pressure on the justice system

Slow pace in resolving drug cases

Staff Correspondent

Currently, the country's courts are flooded with drug cases. Hundreds of cases are being filed every day. However, trials are stalled due to various reasons including delay in filing charge sheets, absence of witnesses, and judge shortage. The number of cases being settled is very low compared to the rate at which cases are being filed across the country. This is creating pressure on the judicial system. Currently, there are 463,836 drug cases pending across the country; which was 143,654 in 2018. There has been an increase of 320,182 cases in the last eight years. 16,260 have been settled in the last three months. 236 cases are suspended on the orders of the High Court.

According to statistics, the Dhaka tribunal



has the highest number of drug cases pending, with 81,139. ??The Chittagong tribunal is in second place with 39,657 cases. The Rajshahi tribunal is in third place with 26,349 cases. Then, Narayanganj, Gazipur and Cox's Bazar courts have more cases than other areas. The slow pace of case disposal is creating a backlog of cases. In addition, the pressure on prisoners in prisons is increasing due to the lack of bail. Again, the accused are getting out on bail and getting involved in the drug trade

again. As a result, the government's main objective of eradicating drugs is being thwarted. In such a situation, Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed has announced an initiative to amend the 'Narcotics Control Act' to provide modern

Continued to page 2

JS passes Tk 9.38 lakh

Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED), Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Law and Justice Division, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, Secondary and Higher Education Division, Ministry of Science and Technology, Health Services Division, Information and Communication Technology Division, Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Ministry of Housing and Public Works, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Ministry of Industries, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Ministry of Land, Ministry of Water Resources, Road Transport and Highways Division, Ministry of Railways, Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, Posts and Telecommunications Division, and the Anti-Corruption Commission.

Upon the request of the opposition leader Dr Shafiqur Rahman, Speaker expedited the passage of the demands for grants imposing guillotine.

Opposition and independent MPs were present in the House when the Appropriation Bill was passed and did not object to its adoption.

The session was chaired by JS Speaker Hafiz Uddin Ahmad, Bir Bikram.

PM calls for ensuring

who are contributing to various fields at home and abroad, to become more actively involved in supporting the university's education, research and innovation activities.

The Prime Minister also stressed the importance of integrating culture, sports and creative activities into education.

He said students should acquire proficiency in a third language alongside Bangla and English, develop moral values, and remain aware of mental health, social inclusion and environmental protection issues.

Highlighting entrepreneurship, Tarique Rahman said universities should nurture young people as job creators rather than job seekers.

The Prime Minister wished the overall success of all programmes undertaken to mark Dhaka University Day.

Govt takes various steps

and 1,181 boundary pillars installed to prevent illegal encroachment.

Regarding the Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC), the minister said rainwater from 109.24 square kilometres is currently drained through three outlets at Kamalapur TT Para, Dholai Khal and Hatirjheel, which is insufficient to meet the city's needs.

"To address the situation, proposals have already been submitted to the ministry for constructing two additional outlets," he said.

He added that under the World Bank-financed Metro Dhaka Resilience Project, a new major drainage outlet from Gulistan to Sadarghat is also planned.

The minister said construction of a box culvert and an eight-foot-diameter large drain is underway to facilitate faster discharge of water from Shyampur Canal into the Buriganga River.

He said DSCC has identified 33 waterlogging-prone hotspots, including New Market, Naem Road, Green Road, Shantinagar, Mugda Medical, Madrasa Education Board area, Majed Sardar Road and West Malibagh.

"To reduce waterlogging in these areas, cleaning and re-excavation of 22 canals, cleaning of four box culverts and ward-based drain cleaning programmes are being carried out," he said.

The minister also said six portable pumps have been installed for the rapid removal of rainwater during heavy rainfall.

He said excavation and sustainable development of four major canals-Kalunagar, Shyampur, Jirani and Manda-are continuing under the government-funded "Canal Restoration, Rehabilitation and Beautification Project."

Mirza Fakhrul said the government is implementing an integrated strategy comprising infrastructure development, construction of new drainage facilities, canal restoration and regular maintenance of the drainage network to provide a lasting solution to Dhaka's waterlogging problem.

Controversial provision

other suitable individual or institution if deemed necessary.

Following the inclusion of the controversial provision, opposition parties alleged that it had been introduced to pave the way for controversial business groups, including S Alam Group, to regain control of banks.

The finance minister also announced that individual depositors of the five merged Shariah-based banks would be allowed to withdraw up to Tk200,000 from their current and savings accounts. The remaining balances would be repaid in phases.

Special humanitarian arrangements have also been made for cancer patients, kidney dialysis patients, Hajj savings account holders and customers of deposit pension schemes (DPS).

To encourage greater investment in the capital market, the finance minister proposed several amendments to the Finance Bill. These include exempting income from zero-coupon bonds from taxation, extending tax concessions for listed companies, providing additional tax benefits to companies that conduct all transactions through banking channels, and reducing the tax rate on dividend income. The government also proposed removing the Tk500,000 investment ceiling for tax rebates on investments in mutual funds.

In his concluding speech, the finance minister said that, as of May, assets worth approximately Tk723.43 billion had been frozen both at home and abroad in connection with 11 priority cases. To facilitate the recovery of funds allegedly laundered overseas, Bangladesh has sent 23 Mutual Legal Assistance Requests (MLARs) to authorities in 13 countries. He added that the government had also initiated the first phase of civil proceedings against six major borrower groups.

The minister said the government was steering the economy away from debt-driven growth towards an investment-led model. As part of this strategy, it has proposed reducing government borrowing from the banking sector by Tk60 billion in the next fiscal year. It also plans to reduce operating expenditure while increasing the share of development spending.

To contain inflation, the government will continue reducing source-level taxes on 60 essential commodities, pursue deregulation to improve the ease of doing business, strengthen supply chains and maintain action against market manipulation.

"The success of a budget lies not in its announcement but in its implementation," the finance minister said, adding that the government would place particular emphasis on institutional reform, accountability and improving implementation capacity.

BITAC training aligns

or launching similar initiatives to include thousands more young people.

Highlighting the programme's contribution to women's empowerment, Muktadir said all 165 female trainees under the project have already secured employment, reflecting its strong impact on job creation.

Speaking on the occasion, Abdun Naser Khan said the

recruitment of trainees by employers even before course completion demonstrates the credibility and effectiveness of BITAC's training curriculum.

He also said BITAC is fostering entrepreneurship alongside employment by providing advanced technology-based training and entrepreneurship development support, enabling many trainees to establish their own businesses and generate further employment opportunities.

AZM Zahid stresses

The minister said the government remains committed to ensuring healthcare services for underprivileged and low-income people while promoting the health and well-being of children.

Noting that children constitute around 34 percent of the country's population, he said quality healthcare for them must be available not only in Dhaka but also in hospitals across the country.

The minister said the present government has been implementing expanded social protection programmes and other welfare initiatives compared to previous years.

"In this context, financial assistance for the treatment of children from poor families is essential," he added.

On the occasion, the minister distributed cheques worth Tk 50,000 each among the guardians of 40 children admitted to the hospital who are suffering from congenital heart disease, kidney disease, cancer, liver cirrhosis, and stroke-related paralysis.

Secretary to the Ministry, Director General of the Department of Social Services, physicians, nurses, hospital officials and employees, and relatives of patients, among others, were present at the programme.

Police hunt Shahadat

displayed a list of names of members of the Rome section of the BNP, including his own designation as joint general secretary.

He described his role with pride as "engaging in politics among his compatriots in the Bangladeshi diaspora."

Police are interviewing those who shared his political activism to determine if anyone may have helped him escape, Il Messaggero says.

Several BNP members have already shared his police photograph on their social media channels.

Amir Uddin, Kamal's twenty-year-old son who survived the attack, is hospitalised at Gemelli Hospital with serious head injuries.

In his account to investigators, he revealed that his father had previously asked the community to remove Hossain because he was exhibiting obsessive and persecutory behaviour towards his mother Jahan.

The two families had connections dating back to when they lived in Noakhali, a city in southern Bangladesh.

According to reports, Shahadat's roommate, a shopkeeper, revealed that the woman had helped the alleged killer find a house, describing him as a relative of hers.

Community members have circulated unverified claims that Hossain and Jahan had been engaged since their youth in Bangladesh, and that her later marriage through an arrangement had distanced her from her former fiancé.

These reports remain under investigation, though they have fuelled speculation within the Bangladeshi community about potential motives.

A social media post Hossain published the day before the massacre may offer insight into his state of mind.

The post read: "A man does not die alone, he dies himself and leaves others as if they are dead. This is why you should die with your loved ones when you die, so that no one has to suffer for anyone else."

Reconstruction of Events

The sequence of events remains under investigation, though the timeline has been clarified through witness accounts and evidence.

The crimes are believed to have occurred between 8:30pm and 9:00pm on Jun 26, though they may have been committed over a longer period.

Officers believe Hossain first attacked Jahan and her daughter, killing them before Kamal returned home from work. By the time Kamal arrived, his wife and daughter were already deceased.

When Amir arrived home last, he reportedly discovered the killer cleaning the crime scene with bleach.

The teenager saw his sister's body emerging from beneath a mattress, prompting him to flee the apartment.

Hossain pursued him, slamming him against a wall and striking him repeatedly with the cleaver before the boy's screams attracted the attention of nearby residents.

Witnesses reported seeing Hossain flee the scene as they looked out from their homes.

Ongoing Investigation into Potential Accomplices

House searches are currently underway among individuals suspected of assisting Hossain's escape.

Investigators are paying particular attention to his political associates within the BNP, examining whether party members or supporters may have harboured him or facilitated his movement following the massacre.

The possibility that accomplices helped arrange his passage to England or Bangladesh, where numerous relatives live, is being actively investigated.

Authorities have not ruled out any possibility at this stage and continue to appeal for information from the public.

The investigation into the Bangladeshi community's networks remains a central focus as law-enforcing agencies work to locate Hossain and determine whether others were involved in aiding his disappearance.

Two more die of

101,077, while the total number of laboratory-confirmed cases stood at 11,965 during the March 15-June 30 period.

Since March 15, a total of 625 children have died from suspected measles and measles-like symptoms across the country.

The DGHS said no new death from laboratory-confirmed measles was reported during the past 24 hours, keeping the total number of confirmed measles deaths unchanged at 93.

A-Challan mandatory for

Online challans surged 92 percent to 5.36 crore, while online collections rose 54.5 percent to Tk 11,298.12 crore. OTC transactions also grew, with collections increasing to Tk 386,397.55 crore during the fiscal year.

The full implementation of A-Challan would help the government know its actual cash position more accurately, reduce idle public money in scattered bank accounts and improve cash management.

Under the manual system, citizens often had to deposit challans at designated branches of selected banks, mainly Bangladesh Bank or Sonali Bank.

This caused unnecessary travel, long waiting time and additional costs for service seekers. Manual challans also delayed the transfer of money to the government treasury, created scope for fake challans and made reconciliation of daily and monthly revenue figures difficult for banks and government offices.

A-Challan was introduced to address these problems. The web-based system allows government revenue and service fees to be deposited through counters of all branches of Bangladesh Bank and commercial banks, internet banking, mobile financial services such as bKash, Nagad, Rocket, Upay and Tap, and debit or credit cards.

For citizens, the biggest benefit is convenience. A person

no longer needs to visit a specific bank branch to deposit government fees. Payments can now be made from a nearby bank branch or through digital channels. Once the payment is completed, the challan receipt is generated instantly and can be used on the same day.

For the government, the benefits are broader. Money deposited through A-Challan is transferred immediately to the Treasury Single Account maintained with Bangladesh Bank. This enables the government to monitor receipts in real time, improves transparency and helps reduce dependence on unnecessary borrowing.

The system also supports automatic reconciliation. After a challan is deposited, payment information is automatically matched among Bangladesh Bank, the relevant accounting office and the concerned government institution.

Credit scrolls sent by Bangladesh Bank are auto-uploaded to iBAS++, allowing accounts to be updated without the delays and errors associated with manual reconciliation.

Officials said the A-Challan dashboard gives ministries, departments and accounting offices real-time information on receipts, transaction status and deposit trends.

The Finance Division introduced the automated challan system in FY2019-20 as part of broader public financial management reforms.

The aim was to ensure real-time deposit of public money, prevent fake challans, improve revenue discipline and give the government a clearer picture of its daily cash balance.

With all government receipts coming through a single digital channel, A-Challan is expected to become a central instrument for faster revenue mobilisation, stronger treasury control and better service delivery.

Ninth Pay Scale: Full

low-income employees or grades 11 to 20.

While presenting the proposed budget for the fiscal year 2026-27, Finance Minister Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury announced the introduction of a new salary structure for government employees. The budget has allocated about Tk 44,000 crore as part of the initial preparations for this program. Although the Finance Minister did not make any detailed announcements in his budget speech, according to officials, this Tk 44,000 crore will be spent mainly on salary adjustment of government officials and employees, pensioners and teachers and employees under MPO. This huge amount of money has been provided by increasing the allocation in the net public service sector, which is about Tk 54,572 crore more than the current fiscal year. As per the recommendations of the Ninth Pay Commission, a major increase of 100 to 142 percent in basic salary and a significant increase in ancillary benefits have been proposed.

It is worth noting that the last time the eighth national pay scale was implemented in 2015, which was implemented in two phases. Maintaining that continuity, the work of restructuring the pay structure is progressing rapidly this time too. Currently, the government spends 1.31 lakh crore taka annually on the salaries and allowances of about 1.4 lakh officials and employees and 9 lakh pensioners. If the new pay scale is implemented, this expenditure will increase further, which is expected to have a significant impact on improving the quality of government services.

Fruit imports fall as

The association submitted a written proposal to the chairman of the National Board of Revenue (NBR).

However, traders noted that previous reductions in import taxes had little impact on wholesale and retail fruit prices.

According to the BFFIA, gradual increases in SD and RD over recent years have significantly raised import costs, with the additional burden ultimately being passed on to consumers.

The association warned that the existing high tariff regime is pushing up consumer prices, reducing the competitiveness of legal importers and encouraging smuggling through border areas.

It proposed removing fresh fruits from the luxury goods category and reclassifying them as essential commodities.

The association also recommended reducing the Regulatory Duty from 20% to zero and lowering the Supplementary Duty from 30% to 20%.

According to an analysis by the Bangladesh Trade and Tariff Commission (BTTC), imports of fresh fruits have declined sharply over the past four fiscal years.

Compared with FY22, imports in FY25 fell by approximately 37.35% for apples, 42.77% for oranges, 35.11% for grapes, 24.70% for pears and 94.38% for pomegranates.

The commission estimated that an apple imported at Tk86 currently attracts around Tk105 in taxes and duties.

It also observed that fruits such as apples, oranges, grapes and pears have limited domestic production, reducing the need for high protective tariffs.

District-level employment

The minister added, "Our government's commitment is to create extensive new employment opportunities across the country, thereby ensuring prosperity and self-reliance for every family."

The proposed exchanges are designed not only to connect job seekers with available vacancies but also to bridge the gap between labour market demand and workforce capabilities.

According to the budget speech, candidates who do not possess the skills required for available positions will be referred to appropriate training centres through the exchanges.

The objective is to help them acquire suitable competencies and improve their prospects for employment.

The government has already started formulating the necessary action plans and policy framework to operationalise the programme and establish a systematic link between employment services and skill development.

Explaining the rationale behind the initiative, the finance minister said: "To establish a fair and merit-based employment system, the government has undertaken an initiative to establish 'Employment Exchange' program at the district and upazila levels across the country."

He continued, "Registered candidates here will be provided with the necessary support for appointment to vacant positions in various organizations, based on their merit and skills."

The initiative is also intended to extend employment services beyond major urban centres. The programme includes targeted outreach for marginalised groups, including rural communities, homemakers and the long-term unemployed, reflecting the government's effort to ensure broader participation in economic activities.

The Employment Exchange programme complements wider employment objectives outlined in the FY27 budget.

The government has set a target of creating 200,000 new jobs annually in the technology sector while generating 800,000 indirect employment opportunities through training in freelancing and creative industries at college and university levels.

To support these goals, the government plans to expand technical and vocational training in areas such as information and communication technology (ICT), robotics and artificial intelligence to help students become workplace-ready.

The budget also proposes a startup fund allocation of Tk 500 crore for FY27 to support young and women entrepreneurs in the information technology sector.

Highlighting the broader economic vision underpinning the initiative, Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury said: "Our

economic strategy places macroeconomic stability, investment promotion, production expansion, employment creation, and, above all, economic justice at its core. We seek to democratise economic opportunities across society, enabling us to harness the Demographic Dividend."

With the formulation of policy frameworks and implementation plans already underway, the district and upazila-level Employment Exchanges are expected to become a key mechanism for linking employment generation, skills development and inclusive economic participation across the country.

Foreign currency reserves

Monday's figure marks the first time in nearly 43 months that gross reserves have exceeded \$37 billion.

Bangladesh Bank publishes reserve data under both the gross method and the IMF's BPM6 standard, which excludes liabilities and short-term obligations to show usable reserves.

Foreign exchange reserves are a key indicator of economic strength.

They had fallen to around \$20 billion before the mass uprising that toppled the Sheikh Hasina government in 2024, raising concerns over the economy.

The new government led by Tarique Rahman has begun its tenure with reserves at a considerably stronger level.

While export earnings have weakened, robust remittance inflows continue to support reserves, which typically decline after Bangladesh settles ACU import payment obligations.

ICT expected to deliver

The tribunal received the investigation report against Inu on September 11, 2025. Testimony began on November 30, with 10 prosecution witnesses and two defence witnesses examined during the trial.

The case stems from the July-August 2024 mass uprising. On August 5, 2024, six people—worker Ashraful Islam, Suruj Ali Babu, student Abdullah Al Mustakin, Usama, businessman Bablu Farazi and employee Yusuf Sheikh were killed when police allegedly opened fire on student protesters and civilians at different locations in Kushtia town. Many others were also injured.

According to the prosecution, the formal charges against Hasanul Haq Inu comprise eight allegations of crimes against humanity linked to the suppression of the July 2024 mass uprising.

To begin with, prosecutors allege that on July 18, 2024, Inu, as president of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), a key ally of the then-ruling 14-party alliance, gave an interview to the Mumbai-based Indian television channel Mirror Now, where he described the protesters as BNP, Jamaat, terrorists and communal elements. The prosecution claims the remarks were intended to delegitimise the movement and incite the use of force against demonstrators.

The prosecution further alleges that on July 19, 2024, Inu attended a meeting of the 14-party alliance at Ganabhaban chaired by then-prime minister Sheikh Hasina. During the meeting, prosecutors claim, a decision was taken to deploy the military nationwide and order security forces to open fire on unarmed participants of the quota reform and Anti-Discrimination Student Movement. Inu is accused of taking part in the decision-making process and of instigating, aiding and facilitating its implementation.

Moreover, prosecutors allege that on July 20, 2024, Inu telephoned the superintendent of police in his home district of Kushtia and instructed the officer to identify protesters from photographs, prepare lists of participants and take action against them.

In addition, the prosecution claims that Inu maintained regular communication with Sheikh Hasina throughout the movement and was involved in planning and conspiring to suppress the protests through the use of lethal weapons, deployment of armed groups, helicopter attacks, arrests and torture. Prosecutors allege that he advised and encouraged such measures.

The charges also state that during an interview with News24 on July 27, 2024, Inu again labelled protesters as BNP, Jamaat, terrorists, militants and communal forces in an effort to discredit the movement. He is further accused of endorsing the imposition of curfew and supporting the government's use of lethal force, killings and repression against protesters.

Furthermore, prosecutors allege that Inu attended another 14-party alliance meeting chaired by Sheikh Hasina on July 29, 2024, where he repeated his characterisation of the protesters as BNP, Jamaat, terrorists and communal elements. He is also accused of proposing a ban on Jamaat-e-Islami, which, according to the prosecution, helped legitimise the killings and repression carried out by law enforcement agencies and armed activists of the ruling alliance.

The prosecution also alleges that on August 4, 2024, Inu endorsed the government's decision to impose a curfew and use live ammunition against protesters. He is further accused of conspiring with Sheikh Hasina over the phone to implement those measures and directing leaders and activists of his party accordingly.

Finally, prosecutors allege that on August 5, 2024, acting on a conspiracy and directives involving Sheikh Hasina, Hasanul Haq Inu and former Awami League Joint General Secretary Mahbub Ul Alam Hanif, Awami League activists, affiliated organisations and police opened fire on unarmed student protesters and civilians at various locations in Kushtia town. The prosecution says the shootings killed six people—Ashraful Islam, Suruj Ali (Babu), Abdullah Al Mustakin, Md Usama, Bablu Farazi and Yusuf Sheikh.

Slow pace in resolving

weapons to members of the Narcotics Control Department. At a function held by the Narcotics Control Department last Friday, he said, "The amendment we have proposed will have courts with jurisdiction. In addition, the government will establish tribunals wherever it deems necessary, considering the number of cases."

It has been learned from discussions with the concerned that out of all the cases filed in the country regarding various crimes, more than 45 percent are drug-related. These cases have been pending for years due to various complications including lack of evidence. As almost 90 percent of the accused have been granted bail or acquitted on this occasion, the future of the case is in doubt. After 2010-11, when the whole country was flooded with Yaba, the number of drug cases has increased further. Considering the dire situation of drugs in the country, on March 3, 2013, the police and the Narcotics Control Department also proposed the formation of a separate judicial court to ensure speedy trial in drug cases. At that time, it was said that it would take at least 20 years to complete the trial of 48,000 drug cases. The Additional Sessions Judge Court at the district level was requested to take necessary measures to resolve the crisis quickly. In 2019, the High Court had ordered the disposal of all drug cases within six months. But it was not implemented properly, rather the number of cases increased.

In this regard, Deputy Attorney General Masud Rana told Jugantar, "In addition to drug users and drug dealers, drug cases have also increased in the country. This is worrying. Due to lack of witnesses and negligence in investigation, delays are being created in the disposal of cases."

The Narcotics Control Act states that the investigation of a case must be completed within 30 working days from the date of arrest with drugs. However, in the last five years, only 85,991 cases have been settled in judicial courts.



Morocco down Netherlands to reach World Cup last 16

Sports Desk

Morocco defeated the Netherlands in a penalty shoot-out to advance to the last 16 of the World Cup on Monday after a thrilling battle in Monterrey finished 1-1 after extra-time.

Morocco goalkeeper Yassine Bounou made the crucial save to block the Netherlands' fifth penalty from Crystencio Summerville before striker Ismael Saibari stepped up to blast home the winning spot-kick that sealed a 3-2 shootout win.

The victory sends Morocco into a last 16 clash with Canada in Houston on Saturday.

An enthralling match had gone to extra time after Issa Diop had glanced in a dramatic equaliser for Morocco in the first minute of stoppage time as the Netherlands closed in on victory.

The Dutch had taken the lead midway through the second half with a goal from Cody Gakpo, playing just days after his partner had confirmed the death of the couple's unborn son.

Liverpool forward Gakpo sank to the turf and appeared overcome with emotion as he was surrounded by team-mates in a prolonged group embrace.

But Morocco forced extra time when an unmarked Diop headed home from substitute Chemsdine Talbi's cross in injury time.

Morocco had created the better chances of a fractious encounter, which saw players from both sides flying into tackles to test the patience of Brazilian referee Wilton Sampaio.

The Atlas Lions almost took the lead on 20 minutes when Neil al-Aynaoui glanced an Achraf Hakimi corner goalwards only to be denied by a superb reflex save from Netherlands goalkeeper Bart Verbruggen.

Verbruggen was pressed into action moments later, this time doing well to tip a vicious strike from Hakimi over the bar.

The fierce nature of the contest was on full display midway through the half when Saibari was lucky to escape sanction after elbowing Jan Paul van Hecke in the face.

The Dutch continued to enjoy plenty of possession but were unable to convert it into goalscoring chances.

Their best effort came on 44 minutes when Tottenham's Micky van de Ven uncorked a ferocious shot from the edge of the area that was tipped over by Bounou.

Van Hecke continued to find himself in the thick of the action, and after bloodying his head in a collision in the penalty area, made his presence felt with a crunching tackle that upended el-Aynaoui just before half-time.

As the half ended Saibari just failed to connect with a cross that flashed across the Dutch goal before going behind.

The drama continued into an end-to-end second half, but appeared to have tilted in the Netherlands' favour when coach Ronald Koeman brought on forward Wout Weghorst in a flurry of substitutions after the hydration break.

Weghorst made an immediate impact flicking on a long ball to send Summerville bearing in on goal. Summerville crossed to Gakpo, who hurled himself at the ball to score.

The Netherlands, superbly marshalled by Gakpo's Liverpool team-mate Virgil van Dijk, appeared to be heading for victory but Diop's late header sent it to extra-time.

Morocco looked to have made the breakthrough when Soufiane Rahimi went through on goal in the 96th minute, only to be denied by a jaw-dropping save from Verbruggen.

Martinelli late show as Brazil down Japan to reach World Cup last 16

Sports Desk

Substitute Gabriel Martinelli pounced deep in injury time as Brazil beat a stubborn Japan 2-1 on Monday to roll into the World Cup last 16.

Arsenal winger Martinelli struck on 95 minutes in Houston to break Japanese hearts in the most dramatic fashion.

The five-time champions will face either the Ivory Coast or Norway in New Jersey on Sunday after edging a captivating knockout encounter.

Japan midfielder Kaishu Sano scored a classy solo goal after 29 minutes following a Brazil mistake to stun the huge numbers of fans decked out in yellow.

Carlo Ancelotti's men hit back 11 minutes after half-time with a header from veteran Casemiro as Brazil dominated the second period.

Then up popped Martinelli right at the death, leaving some of their opponents in tears.

"I can't find the words to describe the joy in my heart. Seeing all those fans on their feet, my parents, my friends... I can't explain it," said the match-winner Martinelli.

History was against Japan: they had never won a knockout game at the World Cup while nobody has lifted the trophy more times than Brazil.

But this is not a vintage Brazil side, even with Ancelotti at the helm, while Japan had been talked of as dark horses.



es. Brazil are attempting to win football's biggest prize for the first time in 24 years.

The midfielder Casemiro praised his side for keeping their cool and plugging away until the end.

"I knew the opportunity would come, so the team is to be congratulated mainly for this calmness within the game," said the 34-year-old.

"When you score, all the team scores, and when you suffer, all the team suffers," added Casemiro, who left Manchester United this summer.

He said it had been "a whirlwind of emotions on the field".

With the Brazil fans' drums providing a constant rhythmic backdrop, Ancelotti's side were on top early on in front of a crowd of 68,777,

Images of Neymar on the bench popped up on the big screens, the noise from the Brazil fans going up another notch.

Defensive midfielder Sano was booked for crunching in on Vinicius Junior, then Brazilian attacker Matheus Cunha forced goalkeeper Zion Suzuki to turn the ball wide.

Japan, who beat Brazil 3-2 in October in a home friendly for their first victory over the South Americans, then enjoyed a spell in the ascendancy.

Just before the half-hour mark Hajime Moriyasu's team took the lead, and it stemmed from an error by Danilo as he gave the ball away with a sloppy pass.

Sano, one of four changes from

Japan's 1-1 draw with Sweden at the end of the group phase, picked the ball up in the centre circle and got away from Casemiro -- who was on a booking -- with ease.

The Mainz midfielder drove upfield before sweeping the ball past goalkeeper Alisson. It was his first goal for his country.

Now the Brazil supporters were edgy, groaning when a move broke down or a pass went backwards.

Brazil, whose last World Cup triumph was in 2002, looked unconvincing at the back and ineffective in attack. Ancelotti was forced into a change at the break, an emotional Lucas Paqueta limping off in distress with the attacking midfielder replaced by 19-year-old striker Endrick. Japan, who thrashed Tunisia and held the Netherlands and Sweden to reach the last 32, had Brazil where they wanted them.

Brazil ramped up the pressure to start the second half and Japan defender Takehiro Tomiyasu twice kept the ball off the line, not that he knew much about it.

Brazil were soon level, Arsenal defender Gabriel sending in an inviting cross for Casemiro to head in unmarked at the back post.

The danger man Vinicius, well stifled up until then, turned the Japan defence inside out and stabbed the ball towards Suzuki, who directed it onto the post.

Last-gasp Brazil down Japan to reach World Cup 16

Sports Desk

Brazil advanced to the last 16 of the World Cup on Monday with a thrilling last-gasp 2-1 victory over Japan as the tournament's knockout rounds got into full swing.

Arsenal striker Gabriel Martinelli was the hero for Brazil in Houston, scoring in the fifth minute of stoppage time to settle an enthralling contest at the NRG Stadium.

Japan had threatened to pull off one of the all-time great World Cup upsets after Kaishu Sano fired them into the lead with a superb 29th-minute goal on the counter-attack.

Brazil looked stunned by the Japanese opener for the remainder of the half and the Asian giants comfortably protected their lead up to half-time.

But Brazil coach Carlo Ancelotti rolled the dice at half-time by bringing on an additional striker in Endrick for midfielder Lucas Paqueta and the

South Americans immediately looked more threatening.

They equalised on 56 minutes, Casemiro nodding in at the far post after a superb curling cross from the left by Gabriel Magalhaes.

Japan though appeared to have done enough to force extra time, but paid the price after Ao Tanaka coughed up possession on the edge of the area in injury time. The ball was quickly played to Martinelli, who took a touch before burying the winner.

"I can't find the words to describe the joy in my heart. Seeing all those fans on their feet, my parents, my friends... I can't explain it," said Martinelli.

"I honestly don't have the words. I'm just happy I was able to help the team, whether I'm playing on the left or through the middle."

Brazil will face either Ivory Coast or Norway in the last 16.

The Houston classic was the first of three last 32 knockout games scheduled on Monday, with Germany facing Paraguay at the Gillette Stadium near Boston and Morocco facing the Netherlands in Monterrey in Mexico.

Germany's tie with Paraguay is their first World Cup knockout match since they defeated Argentina in the final of the 2014 World Cup in Brazil.

Currently ranked 10th in the world, Germany are not widely seen as genuine contenders to win the trophy, even if coach Julian Nagelsmann insists that has to be their aim.

"When you talk about the German national team, it is all about trying to win every game. It is all about winning the game tomorrow," Nagelsmann said on Sunday.

The winner of the Germany-Paraguay duel will face either France or Sweden in the last 16.

The Netherlands meanwhile head into their tie

Entertainment

Shraddha at the cinema with her alleged boyfriend, video goes viral

Entertainment Desk

Bollywood actress Shraddha Kapoor and her rumoured boyfriend Rahul Modi's relationship rumours are not new. This time the couple was spotted together at the cinema, where they were watching Bollywood actor Akshay Kumar's new film 'Welcome to the Jungle'. An inside look of the two laughing happily while watching the film together is now going viral on social media.

Ever since the video was posted on Reddit, fans have been getting mixed reactions. Some have commented jokingly that it makes them wonder how Shraddha is enjoying such a movie. On the other hand, a section of fans have expressed their happiness by seeing Shraddha smiling. Many are speculating that the pair was enjoying the preview or show of the movie sitting in



a VIP screen or Gold Theater. Directed by Ahmed Khan, Welcome to the Jungle is the

third installment in the Welcome franchise. Apart from Akshay Kumar, the big-budget film stars Suniel Shetty, Disha Patani, Jacqueline Fernandez, Arshad Warsi and Paresh Rawal.

Shraddha and Rahul's relationship first came to light in 2023, when they were spotted spending time together on multiple occasions. They then appeared together at a friend's wedding in March 2024.

According to a close source, their closeness grew since they worked together in Luv Ranjan's film 'Tu Jhuti Main Makkar'. Rahul is originally a screenwriter and he was one of the writers of that film. Both of them like to keep their personal lives under wraps, so even if there is no official announcement of their relationship right now, they are not hesitant to appear in front of the camera in public.



Businessman's hanging body found in actress's flat, police investigating

Entertainment Desk

The South Indian entertainment world is in a state of uproar after Kannada actress Krishi Thapanda's hanging body of a businessman named Boishakh was found in her flat in Rajarajeshwari Nagar, Bengaluru. The actress has opened up on social media for the first time since the tragic incident. Sharing an emotional post on Instagram, she has appealed to the people to stop all the rumours and fabricated stories surrounding the incident.

Krishi mentioned in her post that she never imagined that she would have to speak publicly about such a painful situation. She did not have the mental strength or energy to write about this. But due to the ever-growing rumors and the questions being directed at her friends and family, she was finally forced to break her silence. Referring to the deceased Boishakh as a very close and caring person, the actress said that this loss is irreparable and she herself is now going through deep grief.

Meanwhile, during the investigation of the incident, the police have learned that the deceased businessman Boishakh had been suffering from mental depression for a long time and had some personal and family problems. The investigators have also learned that he had been separated from his wife for the past about a month due to a family dispute. However, as no suicide note was recovered from the scene, the police are continuing the investigation to ascertain the exact cause and circumstances of the death.



'Not engaged, I'm in a relationship': Neha opens up about Facebook post

Entertainment Desk

Popular small screen actress Nazneen Niha's personal life has once again been the subject of intense discussion in the entertainment community. However, this time, it is not a third-party rumor like other times, but a Facebook post by the actress herself that has given rise to this new speculation. She has created quite a stir among her fans by changing her relationship status.

Nazneen Niha updated her Facebook profile on Monday by changing her relationship status to 'engaged'. As soon as this information was revealed on social media, speculation spread among her fans that the actress might have secretly gotten engaged. Within moments, the comments section of the post was flooded with well-wishes and all sorts of questions. Many wanted to know the identity of her future life partner, while some even demanded sweets from the actress. However, Niha did not directly respond to any of the fans' comments at that time.

Later, Nazneen Niha faced the media to end all the speculations on this matter. She clearly stated that she is not engaged right now. However, she openly admitted the fact that she is in a relationship now. Niha said that she only wrote 'engaged' on Facebook, which means that she is no longer single or alone, but is in a relationship with someone or the other. Everyone will know the rest of the details at the right time.

The actress added that she likes to be honest about her personal life and that she did not hide the news of her relationship and that she would reveal her partner's identity at an appropriate time. Earlier in February this year, Neha had sparked marriage rumors by posting a picture of Gayechud's two hands with the caption 'Alhamdulillah'. However, it was later revealed that it was not a real-life incident, but rather a part of the promotion of a drama.

Is Jackie and Rakul's marriage falling apart in the 'dating app' controversy?

Entertainment Desk

Bollywood actor and producer Jackie Bhagnani and actress Rakul Preet Singh got married a couple of years ago. Since then, they have been known in the industry as a happy couple. In the meantime, Jackie has now become embroiled in a new controversy. Recently, a screenshot has gone viral on social media, where it is being claimed that Jackie Bhagnani is using a dating app.

The Bollywood star's profile has been spotted on a very popular dating app called 'Raya', which is reserved for celebrities. However, it is not yet known whether this profile is Jackie's real account, or an old inactive

account, or someone has created a fake account using his name.

A Reddit user recently posted this screenshot from a YouTuber's video, which went viral in no time. The screenshot shows that the profile named 'Jackie' has the words 'Actor/Producer' in its bio and lists London, UK as its current location.

It should be noted that 'Raya' is not an ordinary dating app; it is an 'invite-only' platform, where only stars, influential personalities and renowned professionals can join through a strict vetting process. As a result, naturally, since this screenshot was published, various reactions and trolls have been pouring in on social media from netizens.

Netizens are more concerned about the timing of this controversy, because a few months ago, Jackie created a stir by making a comment about his marriage. He jokingly called his marital relationship with Rakul Preet Singh a 'situationship' or a kind of complicated love relationship. He said in an interview that even though they are married, their relationship is like a kind of situationship, where they are loyal to each other but can discuss everything openly. When that comment was heavily criticized, Rakul Preet Singh expressed her anger on social media and wrote that just one line of an hour-long chat was made into a clickbait or cheap news headline by misrepresenting it and taking it out of context.

Editorial

Investment in BR deserves better scrutiny

Almost a decade ago, Bangladesh Railway launched a 30-year master plan to expand rail coverage to all 64 districts of the country and modernise its services. The master plan included a total of 230 projects scheduled to be implemented by 2045 in six phases at a cost of Taka 5.53 trillion. As one-third of the plan period is ending this year, it is imperative to assess the progress made so far. The railway ministry, apparently, is not interested in making such an assessment. Rather, it is venturing into yet another expansion drive. It has decided to implement 13 projects worth Tk 839.90 billion over next 15 years. A report published in this paper Tuesday last noted that funding support from development partners for execution of the projects has been largely confirmed.

It is not known whether these projects are among the master plan projects. But the FE report has indicated that most of these projects are in the master plan and those have now been prioritised for implementation. If so, it is a positive move on the part of the BR because it suggests continuity with the initiatives taken earlier for the greater good of the country's railway system. However, some projects now prioritised require extensive review before any implementation decisions, particularly those that could severely affect densely populated areas and neighbouring ecosystems.

There is no denying that railway is a secure, economical, and environment-friendly mode of transport and, as such, it needs expansion. An efficient railway can transfer, transit and mobilise millions of commuters without much trouble, which is not possible by road transports. Unfortunately, five and a half decades after its independence, Bangladesh is yet to optimise its railway services. At present, it covers only about 3,500 route kilometres across the country, whereas the road network is about 23,000 km long. As a result, 73 per cent of passengers and 82 per cent of cargoes are transported using road transports, although demand for railway remains high. By over-focusing on the road network, successive governments have pushed back the required extension of the rail network. Instead, a number of rail projects have been taken up to feed a section of rent-seekers having political backing. The addition of 20 Diesel Electric Multiple Unit (DEMU) trains to the railway fleet in 2013, at a cost of Tk 6.86 billion, is an example. Though the claimed lifespan is 20 years, most of the trains have become inoperative, and the rest will be abandoned shortly.

No question has been asked about the wastage of taxpayers' money. Unfortunately, there have been no coordinated efforts to establish a well-designed, well-integrated rail-road-river transportation system. More than 90 per cent of passenger train services have been incurring losses for decades, clearly showing their operational inefficiency. Again, a large part of the existing rail tracks is in a dilapidated condition, resulting in slower train speeds and occasional derailment.

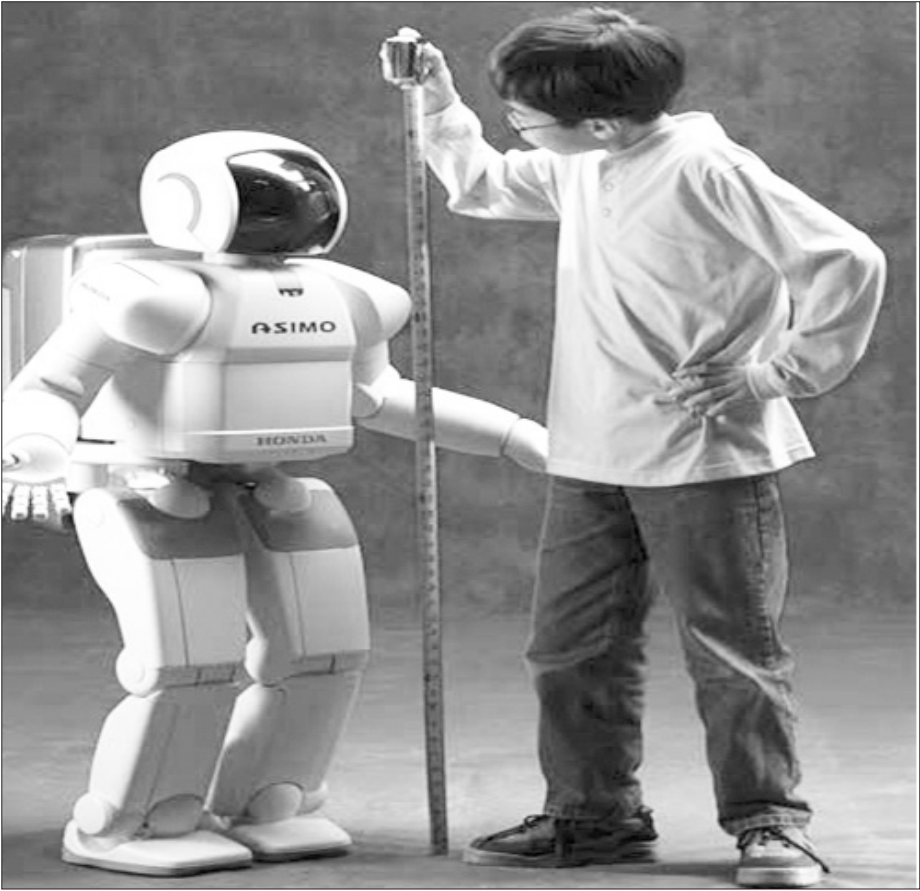
To move forward, the key priority should be to modernise and introduce dual rail tracks across the network. Concurrently, setting up more railway workshops is essential. The truth is, the BR is still far away from introducing a modern and efficient railway service though billions of taka has been spent on its improvement. The government policymakers, seemingly, are also not serious about ensuring a better railway service when a number of far and near countries are operating fast and ultra-modern trains.

Supporting Rohingya's cause amid shrinking aid

When Bangladesh is hemmed in by its own economic problems amid energy crisis, high inflation and unemployment, international humanitarian support for the 1.3 million Rohingya refugees that the country has been hosting for about a decade has reportedly started to shrink drastically. The development has been made clear by the update of the '2026 Joint Response Plan (JRP)' presented by the UN and its partners that appealed for US\$710.5 million to assist 1.56 million individuals including Rohingya refugees and affected Bangladeshi host communities. Notably, the UN JRP is a comprehensive framework developed in coordination with Bangladesh government to raise funds and coordinate humanitarian operations for Rohingya refugees and vulnerable host communities. Notably, the '2026 JRP' amounting to US\$710.5 million is less than that of '2025 JRP' by 26 per cent. This amount can hardly meet the basic survival needs of the refugees. In the face of steadily declining financial contributions from the international community, the aid agencies have been forced to prioritise only the most essential services. Now, with dwindling foreign aid, Bangladesh, given its own limitations, cannot be expected to sustain the burden of so many refugees indefinitely. The issues are not just about economics. Housing more than a million refugees mainly in the congested camps of Cox's Bazar has severely impacted the local ecosystem, not to mention the strain the economy has been put under. Worse, the overcrowded camps and the lack of livelihoods are fuelling social tensions and localised crimes. Also, deteriorating camp infrastructure and extreme weather vulnerabilities leave refugees and the local communities in constant jeopardy. Against this backdrop, when the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stated that the Rohingya response has entered a 'fragile phase', it definitely does not bode well for the Rohingya as refugees and Bangladesh as their host. But despite the disheartening reports about the general donor fatigue regarding aid for the Rohingya refugees, Finland, an important donor nation,

Robotic Power and Robotic Charisma Will Dominate the Future World

By Ahsan Habib



on stretchers after toppling over during play.

China is ramping up efforts to advance AI-driven humanoid robots, using sports such as marathons, boxing, and football as testing grounds to refine their performance

in real-world scenarios.

The founder and CEO of Booster Robotics-the company that provided the robot players-described sports competitions as ideal environments to develop the com-

plex interaction between hardware, software, and AI algorithms.

He also underlined the importance of safety, especially with future plans for human-robot matches.

"In the future, we might organize football games between robots and humans. For that to happen, we must guarantee absolute safety," Cheng explained. "These matches wouldn't focus on winning or losing but would allow for real offensive and defensive interactions. That's how we can build public trust and show that robots are safe."

Booster Robotics supplied the hardware for all four university teams, while the universities themselves developed the AI algorithms for perception, game strategy, formations, and passing - considering variables such as speed, force, and direction, according to Cheng.

In the final, Tsinghua University's THU Robotics defeated the China Agricultural University's Mountain Sea team with a 5-3 scoreline to claim the championship over the recent period of time. Tsinghua supporter Mr. Wu cheered his team's victory but also praised the competition.

"THU performed really well," he said. "But the Mountain Sea team from Agricultural University also exceeded expectations. It was a thrilling match."

China's men's football team, meanwhile, has only qualified for the World Cup once and has already been eliminated from next year's tournament in Canada, Mexico, and the United States.

In this way, we can foretell that that time is not afar when the will occur a drastic change in all the set programs and managements of the world.

[The writer is a Computer Science Engineer]

Forgotten micro-entrepreneurs

Iftekhar Ul Karim

The most remarkable entrepreneurs in Bangladesh may be the ones we rarely recognise as entrepreneurs. They are the widow who turns a home kitchen into a small catering business after losing her family's primary breadwinner, the retired teacher who channels decades of experience into a neighbourhood coaching centre to supplement an inadequate pension, and the young person with a disability who reaches customers through an online store after discovering that conventional employment offers few opportunities. Their enterprises are modest, often informal and largely absent from public debate. At their core, they embody the very essence of entrepreneurship by transforming adversity into opportunity through skill, resilience and initiative.

As Bangladesh marks World MSME Day, these stories invite us to broaden our understanding of entrepreneurship itself. When entrepreneurship is discussed in Bangladesh, public attention tends to gravitate towards start-ups, formal SMEs, exporters, industrialists, and corporate success stories. These achievements deserve recognition. However, they represent only one part of the country's entrepreneurial landscape. Across urban neighbourhoods and rural communities alike, countless micro-entrepreneurs operate quietly beyond public recognition, even though their contribution to livelihoods and local economies is no less significant. For many of them, enterprise is not merely a pathway to income but a means of preserving dignity, independence and a sense of purpose in the face of economic uncertainty.

Among the many groups for whom micro-enterprise serves as a pathway to productive engagement, the growing number of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh offers perhaps the clearest illustration of both the challenges and the possibilities involved. Faced with limited opportunities in the conventional labour market, many choose a different path through self-employment and micro-enterprise. For them, entrepreneurship is not merely a means of earning an income; it is a way of demonstrating capability. Whether operating an online business, a mobile financial services outlet, a tailoring enterprise or a home-based retail venture, these entrepreneurs challenge persistent assumptions that equate disability with dependency. Their experiences offer a broader lesson for policymakers and society alike. True inclusion is not achieved simply through welfare programmes or legal protections; it is achieved when individuals are empowered to participate fully in economic life, create value through their own efforts and contribute to their communities with dignity. Recognising this potential, several countries have begun to incorporate micro-

entrepreneurship into their disability inclusion strategies. In Canada, the Entrepreneurs with Disabilities Programme provides aspiring entrepreneurs with disabilities access to mentoring, business planning assistance, training and financing support, reflecting a shift from welfare-based approaches towards economic empowerment. Similar thinking is gaining traction elsewhere, including in

social participation. Recognising the economic and social value of older entrepreneurs, several countries have introduced policies to support enterprise beyond retirement. In Japan, one of the world's oldest societies, community-based businesses and senior entrepreneurship programmes encourage older citizens to remain economically active and socially engaged. South Korea's ministry



the United Kingdom and Australia. Bangladesh's growing digital economy, widespread mobile connectivity and expanding culture of self-employment provide a strong foundation upon which a more inclusive micro-entrepreneurial ecosystem could be built for millions of Bangladeshis living with disabilities. A similar case can be made for Bangladesh's growing elderly population. As life expectancy rises and traditional family support structures evolve, many older citizens are choosing to remain economically active well beyond retirement age. Some do so out of necessity, seeking to supplement meek pensions or savings. Others are driven by a desire to remain productive and engaged. Across the country, skilled elderly artisans continue to operate small workshops from their homes and communities. Older farmers supplement their incomes through poultry, fisheries and small-scale agro-processing ventures. Others manage neighbourhood grocery shops, home-based catering businesses and small trading enterprises built on relationships and skills accumulated over a lifetime. Their ventures may not generate headlines, but they draw upon decades of experience, knowledge and social capital. In an ageing society, micro-entrepreneurship offers not only an additional source of income but also a means of preserving purpose, independence and

of SMEs and Startups has also established dedicated senior business incubators and retraining initiatives to help retirees start small enterprises, while the United States has promoted 'encore entrepreneurship', which supports older adults seeking to launch businesses later in life. For Bangladesh, where life expectancy continues to rise and pension coverage remains limited, policymakers could do more to harness elderly experience and networks through extending support for their micro-enterprises and self-employment. Perhaps nowhere is the transformative power of micro-enterprise more evident than among widows and single mothers in rural Bangladesh. For many women, the loss of a spouse, family separation or sole responsibility for household income leaves few viable alternatives but to create sustainable livelihoods. Across Bangladesh, countless women operate home-based catering services, tailoring businesses, beauty parlours, handicraft ventures and online retail enterprises, often while simultaneously managing childcare and domestic responsibilities. Their businesses are typically small in scale, yet their impact extends far beyond income generation. They help sustain families, support children's education and provide a measure of financial security in circumstances that

might otherwise lead to economic vulnerability.

Around the world, policymakers increasingly recognise micro-entrepreneurship as a pathway to greater economic independence and resilience for vulnerable women. Rwanda has embedded women's entrepreneurship within its national development strategy through targeted training, financing, and market-access support, while leveraging the AfCFTA to help women scale their businesses across the continent. Similarly, Indonesia leads the ASEAN region in digital inclusivity, using digital platforms, mobile money, and social media aggregators to help women-owned MSMEs access broader markets. Bangladesh already has many of the foundations needed to build on these successes, including a strong microfinance ecosystem, widespread mobile connectivity, and a growing digital marketplace. The challenge now is not only to expand support but also to create opportunities that enable more people to participate in economic life.

Bangladesh is not starting from scratch in any of these areas. For people with disabilities, government allowances, skills-development initiatives, and growing access to digital platforms have already enabled many individuals to pursue self-employment and micro-enterprise opportunities. For older citizens, community-based livelihood programmes, NGO-supported income-generating activities, and the continued engagement of experienced professionals in small businesses demonstrate the economic potential of active ageing. Likewise, widows and single mothers have benefited from Bangladesh's extensive microfinance network, women-focused entrepreneurship programmes, and expanding digital marketplaces, which have helped many establish home-based enterprises and strengthen household resilience. These achievements provide a solid foundation. The next challenge is to move beyond fragmented initiatives and build a more coordinated ecosystem that enables these micro-entrepreneurs to grow, formalise where appropriate, and access wider markets and support services.

Among the many groups for whom micro-enterprise serves as a pathway to productive engagement, the growing number of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh offers perhaps the clearest illustration of both the challenges and the possibilities involved. Faced with limited opportunities in the conventional labour market, many choose a different path through self-employment and micro-enterprise. For them, entrepreneurship is not merely a means of earning an income; it is a way of demonstrating capability. Whether operating an online business.

Skilled workforce key to building new BD: Faridul Islam

Bagerhat Correspondent

State Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Lion Shaikh Faridul Islam has urged students to utilise their knowledge, skills and creativity for the country's development, saying a skilled workforce will be the greatest strength in building a new Bangladesh. He made the remarks while distributing one-time scholarships among 418 meritorious students at a programme organised by the Bagerhat Zila Parishad at its auditorium in the district town on Saturday. The scholarships were awarded to students who excelled in the 2025 SSC and equivalent and HSC and equivalent examinations, as well as those who secured admission to public universities, medical colleges and engineering universities across the country. The programme was chaired by Bagerhat Zila Parishad Administrator and BNP leader Barrister Shaikh Mohammad Zakir Hossain. Former secretary Dr Md Faridul Islam attended it as the special guest. A total of Tk 27.28 lakh was distributed among the recipients. Of the beneficiaries, 55 students admitted to public universities, medical colleges and engineering universities received Tk 10,000 each, while 363 students who achieved outstanding results in the SSC and HSC examinations received Tk 6,000 each. Addressing the students, the state minister said many talented students from Bangladesh's coastal areas are unable to pursue higher education because of various challenges.

"I am also a son of the coastal region. During my school days, I had to swim across five canals to attend school. So I know the value of struggle," he said, adding that the students' achievements reflected their hard work, perseverance and the sacrifices made by their families.

He also stressed the importance of nurturing moral values, patriotism and social responsibility alongside higher education. He urged the students to stay away from drugs, corruption and social degradation and develop themselves into responsible citizens.

During the programme, the Zila Parishad presented a commemorative crest to the state minister, which was handed over by Barrister Shaikh Mohammad Zakir Hossain.

Among others present were Additional Deputy Commissioner (Revenue) Anup Kumar Das, Bagerhat District BNP Convener Engineer ATM Akram Hossain Talim, Government Prafulla Chandra College Principal Md Jahangir Ali, Khan Jahan Ali Degree College Principal Khandaker Asif Uddin Raki, and local dignitaries.

Earlier in the day, the state minister inaugurated a tree plantation programme on the campus of Government Prafulla Chandra College, attended by teachers, students and local BNP leaders.



Proposed Chalan Beel eco-tourism and water park project set to transform northern Bangladesh

Golam Mostafa, Sirajganj

A proposed mega development project aimed at transforming the Chalan Beel region into a world-class tourism destination has gained fresh momentum, with relevant government ministries and agencies reportedly initiating preliminary activities following the Prime Minister's positive consideration of the proposal. The project, titled "Integrated ChalanBeel Eco-Tourism, Modern Recreation City and Children's Water Park Development Project," is expected to become a landmark initiative for the socio-economic development of northern Bangladesh, particularly the Raiganj-Tarash-Salanga region of Sirajganj.

According to sources, Member of Parliament for Sirajganj-3 (Raiganj-Tarash-Salanga), VP AynulHaque, has been actively working to harness the vast tourism potential of ChalanBeel by developing it into an international-standard tourist destination. The proposed mega project has been prepared under his direct guidance and supervision.

The project's comprehensive profile and concept paper were prepared by MahbubAlam Sheikh, Personal Officer to the MP, following detailed assessments of the region's geographical characteristics, tourism prospects, economic impact, employment opportunities and environmental sustainability.

The proposed development includes environmentally friendly eco-resorts, modern motels, a children's water park, cable car facilities, boating and water tourism, bird-watching towers, a cultural complex, floating restaurants, food courts, tourism police outposts and a range of family-oriented recreational facilities designed to meet international standards. Stakeholders believe the project will

stimulate significant economic activities across northern Bangladesh by creating thousands of direct and indirect employment opportunities. It is also expected to expand business prospects for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), attract private investment and strengthen women's participation in the local economy.

Local political leaders and community representatives say the initiative reflects MP VP AynulHaque's election commitment to promoting sustainable development, generating employment, improving infrastructure and building a technology-driven, investment-friendly parliamentary constituency.

Besides tourism, the lawmaker has reportedly prioritized development initiatives in education, agriculture, transport and employment, with the ChalanBeel tourism project emerging as one of his flagship programmes.

Speaking about the initiative, MP VP AynulHaque said, "ChalanBeel is not merely a wetland; it represents the livelihood, culture and immense potential of the people of northern Bangladesh. We want to preserve its natural ecosystem and biodiversity while placing it on the international tourism map. Once implemented, this project will open new horizons for employment, investment, tourism and regional development."

MahbubAlam Sheikh, who prepared the project profile, said the proposal was developed in line with the MP's vision, focusing on the region's long-term development prospects, economic significance and tourism potential. Residents of the area have expressed optimism that, with continued support from the government and the relevant ministries, the proposed ChalanBeel international tourism project will move forward swiftly, ushering in a new era of economic growth and sustainable development for northern Bangladesh.

Four people found dead in four districts

Our Correspondents

Four people, including an HSC examinee, were found dead in Cox's Bazar, Joypurhat and Feni districts and Dashmina Upazila of Patuakhali District in three days. COX'S BAZAR: The floating body of a tourist, who went missing while bathing at Inani beach in Cox's Bazar on Saturday noon, was recovered by beach guards, fire service, tourist police and Bangladesh Coast Guard, in Rezukhal in Ukhiya Upazila of the district on Sunday morning. Deceased Mohammad Sayem, 22, was the son of Mohammad Iqbal of Hathazari Upazila in Chattogram District.

Sayem's friend Md Arman said that they went for a bath at the beach at around 12:30 pm. Suddenly, a big wave swept Sayem into the deep sea.

Tourist Police Inspector at Inani Gazi Ataur Rahman said that a search operation was conducted in the sea with the help of several engine boats but Sayem was not found till evening.

Belal Uddin, in-charge of the beach workers of the Cox's Bazar District Administration, said, "Seeing the body, Sayem's father Mohammad Iqbal identified it. The body was recovered and sent to the morgue at Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital for an autopsy."

JOYPURHAT: The police recovered the body of a housewife named Bandana Rani Das from Durgadaha Dhulipara area of Joypurhat Sadar Upazila on Sunday morning.

The victim's family claimed that she was beaten to death by her husband due to a family dispute. The police arrested the husband Rajkumar Das, son of Bablu Das of the village, in this incident.

According to police and local sources, on Saturday night, the husband and wife quarrelled with each other. Later on Sunday morning, the housewife's father-in-law found her hanging body. On information, the police recovered the body and sent it to the morgue for an autopsy.

Sub-Inspector of Joypurhat Police Station (PS) Anwar Hossain said that there are injury marks on the deceased's body. After the autopsy report is available, the real mystery of the death will be known.

FENI: Police have recovered the body of a Jubo League (JL) leader with his throat slit in the Nur Ahmed Masterbari area of Ghopal Union in Chhagalnaiya Upazila of the district on Saturday morning.

The deceased Jobair Hossain Parvez, 32, was the son of Abu Taher of the area and the organising secretary of Union Jubo League. The deceased's father said that he last saw his son at around 1 am on Saturday. The deceased's younger brother, Sabbir Hossain, alleged that Parvez had a dispute with Shahadat Hossain and Mamunur Rashid Mamun, sons of Sadek Mia, from the same village, over a shop. He may have been killed over that dispute, he claimed.



Honda Mango fest 2026 promotes green future in Chapainawabganj

Special Correspondent

Bangladesh Honda Private Limited (BHL) successfully hosted the Honda Mango Fest 2026, a vibrant customer engagement event designed to celebrate the rich cultural heritage of Chapainawabganj while championing environmental sustainability.

Now in its second edition, the festival served as a platform to strengthen the bond between the brand and its community. Beyond the celebration of local culture, the event featured a major Tree Plantation Initiative, aligning with Honda's global environmental slogan: "BLUE SKIES FOR OUR CHILDREN."

This year's festival brought together Honda motorcycle riders, local dignitaries, community leaders, and BHL management for a day of celebration and social contribution. Participants engaged

in various activities, including rider meet-ups, cultural experiences, and community interactions, all while working together to plant saplings to support a greener future.

Mr. Susumu Morisawa, Managing Director & CEO of BHL, remarked, "Honda Mango Fest is not just about celebrating the region's heritage; it is about our commitment to becoming a company that society wants to exist. By planting trees yesterday, we are investing in the well-being of future generations."

Mr. Shah Muhammad AshequrRahman, Chief Marketing Officer of BHL, added, "This event reflects our belief that a strong brand is built through meaningful contributions to society. We are proud to bring our community together for such a sustainable and impactful cause."

For more details, visit www.bdhonda.com or call the hotline at 08000430430.

Illegal sand lifting from Padma continues in Shariatpur

Shariatpur Correspondent

Allegations have been found that an influential group is lifting sand from the Padma River in Char Atra and Naopara areas of Naria Upazila of the district by installing hundreds of dredgers and selling it to different districts of the country.

This has put thousands of people's houses and river protection dams under threat of further erosion. However, the upazila administration has permitted to lift sand following their demands and rules and regulations.

According to the complaints of the locals, thousands of them are living an uncertain life due to the sand lifting at about 50 places. Local residents- Abdul Awal Chowkidar and Saidur Rahman of Bashtala area in the upazila said, "If illegal sand lifting is not stopped soon, the river will further erode all their belongings."

Kashem Siddique, a resident of Ward No. 2 of Naopara Union, said, "An influential group is lifting sand from the Padma Riverbed using party influence and selling it. As a result, we are likely to face erosion again."

However, the sand lifters claim that they are lifting sand legally through government tenders. When contacted, Deputy Commissioner Tahsina Begum did not agree to talk on this issue.

In this connection, Naria Upazila Nirbahi Officer Md Abdul Qaiyum Khan said, "According to the policy, a lease has been given for sand lifting. If any irregularities are found, legal action will be taken."

Executive Engineer of Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) in Shariatpur Khan Mohammad Waliuzzaman said, "Sand lifting from the river can be harmful or beneficial. The matter needs to be studied. However, if someone lifts sand illegally, it is the responsibility of the district administration to



Mymensingh City launches national Vitamin

Rayhan Ahmed, Mymensingh

Mymensingh, June 28, 2026: The National Vitamin A Plus Campaign 2026 was officially inaugurated in the Mymensingh City Corporation area on Sunday, with an aim to improve child nutrition and prevent Vitamin A deficiency among children.

The campaign was formally launched by Mymensingh City Corporation Administrator Mohammad Rukunuzzaman Rokon in the presence of officials and employees of the city corporation.

During the inaugural ceremony, children from all 33 wards of the city received Vitamin A capsules. As part of the nation-

wide initiative, Vitamin A capsules will be administered to eligible children at designated campaign centres, including the offices of all 33 ward councillors across the city.

The campaign is designed to ensure proper nutrition for children and reduce the health risks associated with Vitamin A deficiency. City Corporation authorities expressed their commitment to making the campaign a success by ensuring that all eligible children receive the life-saving supplement.

Health officials urged parents and guardians to bring their eligible children to the nearest designated centres to receive the Vitamin A capsules and contribute to building a healthier future generation.

41 people arrested in 72 hours in Rangpur

Rangpur Correspondent

Rangpur Metropolitan Police (RpMP) in special anti-crime drives arrested a total of 41 people, including those accused in murder, visa fraud, forgery, kidnapping, rape, anti-terrorism, drugs and other cases, in the last 72 hours.

"The six police stations and other units of RpMP conducted separate operations and arrested these accused from different areas of the metropolis," a RpMP press release said here this evening.

The special operations were conducted under the overall direction of RpMP Police Commissioner Mohammad Abdul Mabud.

A good quantity of heroin, Yaba tablets, ganja, gambling materials, fake band-rolled bidi worth Taka 6,80,000 and a covered van and other illegal goods were also recovered in the drives. Legal action has been taken against the arrested accused. RpMP will continue such raids to maintain the law and order situation in the metropolis, the release added.

Tarash Correspondent

Heifers were distributed among poor beneficiaries in Tarash upazila of Sirajganj on Sunday under a livelihood support initiative funded by the Bangladesh NGO Foundation (BNF).

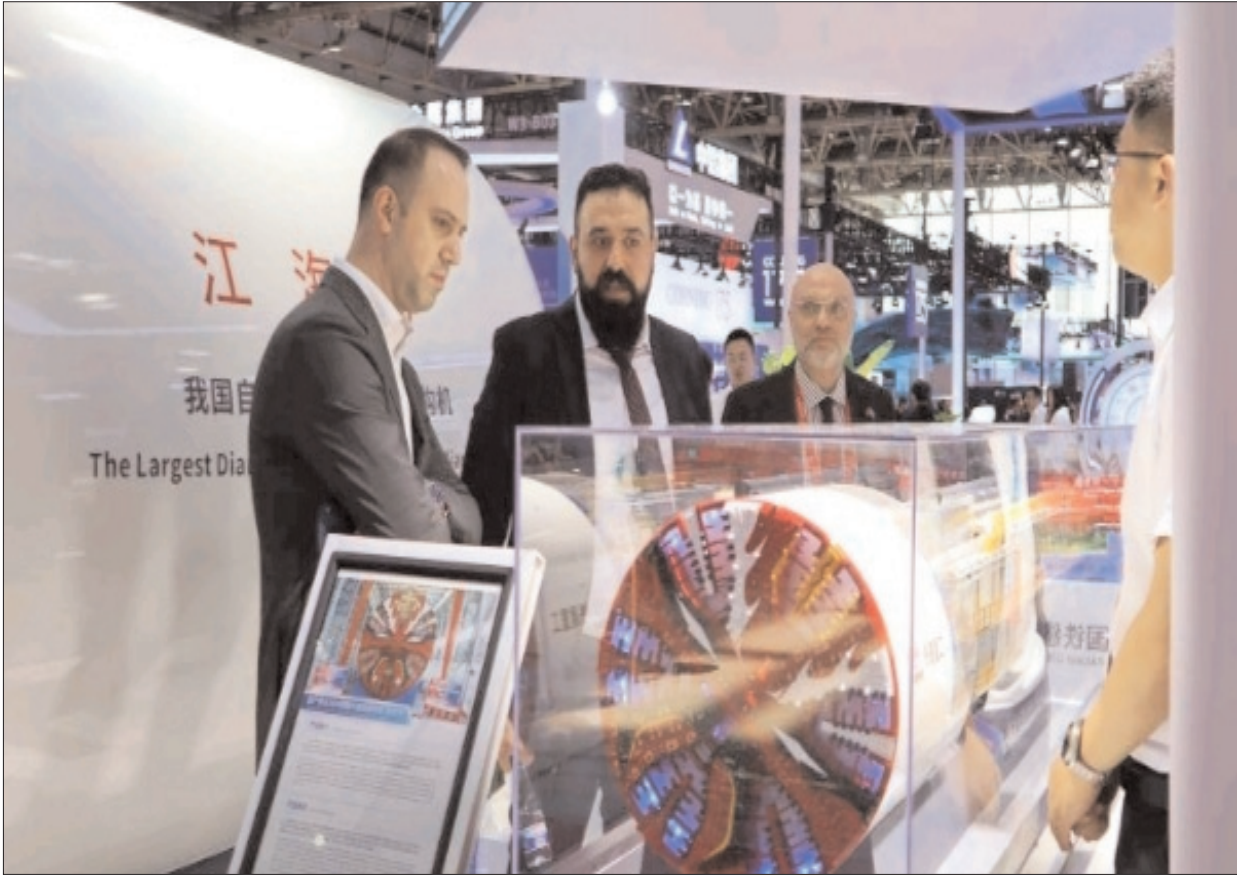
The distribution programme was held at the Tarash Public Library premises, where the Managing Director of the Bangladesh NGO Foundation and former Additional Secretary to the Government of Bangladesh, Md. Shahjahan, formally handed over the heifers to the selected beneficiaries.

Also present at the event was Abdul Majid, Executive Officer of the Bangladesh NGO Foundation.



Among the distinguished guests were Tarash Upazila Nirbahi Officer NusratJahan, Upazila Agriculture Officer Sharmistha Sen Gupta, Officer-in-Charge of Tarash Police Station Md. Habibur Rahman, Veterinary Surgeon Dr. Md. Badal Mia, Upazila Youth Development Officer Md. Taizul Islam, Vice-President of Poriborton, a partner organization of the Bangladesh NGO Foundation, Md. Amiruzzaman, Director Abdur RazzakRaju, and other local officials and community representatives.

The initiative aims to improve the livelihoods of under privileged families by providing income-generating assets, enabling beneficiaries to become economically self-reliant through livestock rearing.



China's Supply Chain Reaches New Heights in the AI Era

International:

Artificial intelligence (AI) took centre stage at the Fourth China International Supply Chain Expo (CISCE), where cutting-edge innovations highlighted China's expanding role in shaping the future of global supply chains.

The event featured intelligent robots, breakthrough AI technologies from leading Chinese and international companies, and, for the first time, a dedicated AI exhibition zone. The expo has increasingly become an important platform for integrating foreign investment into China's innovation ecosystem and strengthening international cooperation across industrial and supply chains.

Yang Yuan, Chairman of Supply

Chain for Greater China at Procter & Gamble (P&G), said China has established a leading position in automation and AI applications.

"China is well ahead in the fields of automation and AI applications. Going forward, we will place even greater emphasis on AI and automation to further enhance the overall performance and efficiency of our supply chain," Yang said.

Wang Qichong, Chairman of Intel China, said the company currently maintains close partnerships with more than 15,000 local Chinese enterprises.

"China's innovation ecosystem continues to grow stronger. Together with our local partners, we hope to explore more application scenarios by closely integrating advanced computing tech-

nologies, thereby accelerating productivity growth," Wang said.

Zhang Kaifeng, Senior Vice President of Schneider Electric Group and Head of Global Supply Chain for the China Region, said the company sources more than 90 percent of its supply chain locally in China.

"To further strengthen our supply chain collaboration model, we are working closely with approximately 1,600 supplier partners," Zhang said.

The growing presence of multinational companies at the CISCE reflects China's increasingly prominent role in global supply chains, particularly in emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, advanced manufacturing and digital innovation.

Source: Cai, Alim and Wang Haiman, China Media Group (CMG).



New Caledonia holds first local vote since 2019

International Desk

Voters in the French overseas territory of New Caledonia cast ballots Sunday in the archipelago's first provincial elections since 2019, after the vote was delayed as talks stalled over its political future.

The results of the election, initially planned for 2024, will determine the balance of power in New Caledonia ahead of fresh negotiations with France on the territory's status, with independence remaining the defining political issue.

The poll took place peacefully, an AFP journalist in the capital Noumea observed, with additional security deployed two years after deadly riots erupted over a plan to extend voting rights in the territory. An hour before the polling stations closed at 6:00 pm (0700 GMT), turnout stood at 54.42 per cent -- down slightly from 58.49 per cent at the same point in 2019, according to local authorities.

Some 192,500 voters were eligible to elect 76 councillors for three provincial assemblies -- 40 in the South Province, 22 in the North Province and 14 in the Loyalty Islands. Fifty-four of those elected will become members of the Pacific archipelago's Congress, the territory's main governing institution and

the only body authorised to pass local laws.

Members of Congress will then elect up to 11 members to the executive branch known as the collegial government.

"My grandparents fought hard to secure the right" to vote, said Cedric Ixeco, a 43-year-old who hails from the indigenous Kanak group, adding he "wants to see things change" in people's day-to-day lives. For Barbara Meylan, 53, the election was a crucial moment for the archipelago, which she said is in need of a way forward.

"Above all, I hope we can stabilise the country and manage to find common ground," she said.

- Negotiations ahead -

The elections come after the main pro-independence group rejected a deal with France intended to bring stability to the overseas territory. The so-called Bougival Accord would have created a Caledonian state and established a Caledonian nationality enshrined in the French constitution, but would have scrapped any future referendums on independence.

Three referendums held in 2018, 2020 and 2021 returned majorities in favour of remaining part of France, although pro-independence groups boycotted the third vote, which was

held during the Covid-19 pandemic. But the independence movement retains strong support, particularly among the indigenous Melanesian Kanak population.

A law approved in May added around 10,575 previously excluded "native-born" residents to the electoral roll, including more than 4,000 people with so-called "customary civil status", which denotes Kanaks.

The change increased the number of eligible voters for Sunday's poll, after the electoral roll had been frozen under a landmark 1998 agreement.

A previous plan to extend voting rights to thousands of non-Indigenous long-term residents sparked deadly riots in 2024.

The election took place under close scrutiny more than two years after the violence, which left 14 people dead and caused more than two billion euros worth of damage.

France has deployed around 2,400 law enforcement officers to New Caledonia, where they are to remain until mid-July.

French Prime Minister Sebastien Lecornu has promised negotiations on the overseas territory's future will resume next month, with the goal of reaching an agreement before the year's end.

Guinean Prime Minister Sees Greater Scope for Bilateral Cooperation During China Visit

International:

Guinean Prime Minister Amadou Oury Bah has expressed optimism about deepening bilateral ties with China, describing the country as a model of development for the developing world. He made the remarks in an exclusive interview with China Global Television Network (CGTN), a subsidiary of China Media Group (CMG), during his recent visit to Beijing.

The visit marked Prime Minister Bah's first official trip to China, where he also attended the Annual Meeting of the New Champions of the World Economic Forum, commonly known as the Summer Davos Forum.

In the interview, Bah said China has emerged as a global model of development over the past four decades, demonstrating how a nation can overcome poverty and underdevelopment to become a leading force on the international stage.

"We hope to learn from China's experience," he said, adding that global leaders must work together to shape the future course of development.

The prime minister noted that Guinea has benefited significantly from cooperation under the Belt and



Road Initiative (BRI). He expressed hope that his visit would further strengthen bilateral relations and open up new opportunities for cooperation. He also said Guinea looks forward to benefiting from the various global initiatives proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Highlighting agricultural cooperation, Bah recalled the launch of the Koba Agricultural Production Project in April last year. He said Guinea had introduced high-yield rice varieties developed by the late Chinese agricultural scientist Yuan Longping, a mem-

ber of the Chinese Academy of Engineering. According to the prime minister, China's willingness to share the outcomes of its scientific research enables developing countries with the greatest need for such technologies to benefit from them.

Bah also emphasized the vast potential of the Chinese market, saying both countries would review the full range of goods traded between them to identify new areas of cooperation and achieve greater mutual benefit.

Source: Chai-Alim-Wang Haiman, China Media Group.

US World Cup prowess boosts American passion for the beautiful game

International Desk

The barnstorming US performance in the World Cup group stage has helped cement the appeal of football for millions of sports-lovers in the country that is co-hosting the tournament along with Mexico and Canada. Solid wins over Paraguay and Australia saw the United States finish top of Group D with more goals for the US men's team than at any past World Cup.

"I need to remind everyone we won the group, sorry guys, we won," said head coach Mauricio Pochettino after the US slipped in their final group encounter to lose 3-2 against Turkey. Outside the match at the Los Angeles Stadium in Inglewood, 35-year-old physical therapist Ian Bjerke wore overalls adorned with the Stars and Stripes. "That just shows my commitment to this team," he joked of his sartorial choice.

"I'm usually more into baseball, and I have to say, it's been fun to watch! The game is exciting, it's a lot more fast-paced."

Bjerke, a relative newcomer to football fandom, said there were still improvements to be made for Americans to fully embrace soccer. "We could do some better singing, though. I feel like so many countries have better songs," he said.

Nearby, business consultant Matt Movahhed described the US team as more exciting than past iterations. "They play a more offensive style, and I think that makes me want to pay attention more -- and it probably has the same effect on other Americans," added Movahhed, 40.

Off the pitch, feel-good viral moments have also increased engagement with the tournament.



Legions of "Tartan Army" fans from Scotland roaming around Boston and Miami in kilts while adorning statues with orange traffic cones and drinking entire bars dry won over many locals.

Thousands of Norwegian fans took over Citi Field stadium, the New York home of the Mets baseball franchise, performing their noisy trademark Viking rowing for the locals who included the team's mascots Mr and Mrs Met who joined in.

And in Kansas City, an army of Netherlands fans flocked to downtown for an "Oranje Fanwalk", creating a sea of orange captured on timelapse.

- 'More than a sporting event' -

"The cultural aspects that make it more than a sporting event appeal to people everywhere," said Amy Bass, a professor of sports studies at Manhattanville University.

"People are obsessing about the matches, sure, but they're also following 'Freddy' the German fan as he

shares his experiences across the American South, eating at gas stations and discovering country music."

US fan Dante Drishti, 25, who played football throughout school, said it was "great for Americans to immerse themselves in all those cultures and for visitors to immerse themselves in the American culture."

"That's what the Word Cup is all about! It's also an opportunity for Americans to discover soccer culture," Drishti said as he made his way to the Ecuador-Germany game at the MetLife stadium on Thursday.

But fellow game-goer Bryan Flaherty, 32, from Philadelphia suggested the hype would not last, insisting "it's kind of typical American behavior to jump on the World Cup bandwagon."

"In three weeks, 75 percent will have forgotten all about it," he said. The commercial impact of the tournament may not be so quickly forgotten by big business.

US World Cup prowess boosts American passion for the beautiful game

International Desk

The barnstorming US performance in the World Cup group stage has helped cement the appeal of football for millions of sports-lovers in the country that is co-hosting the tournament along with Mexico and Canada.

Solid wins over Paraguay and Australia saw the United States finish top of Group D with more goals for the US men's team than at any past World Cup.

"I need to remind everyone we won the group, sorry guys, we won," said head coach Mauricio Pochettino after the US slipped in their final group encounter to lose 3-2 against Turkey.

Outside the match at the Los Angeles Stadium in Inglewood, 35-year-old physical therapist Ian Bjerke wore overalls adorned with the Stars and Stripes.

"That just shows my commitment to this team," he joked of his sartorial choice.

"I'm usually more into baseball, and I have to say, it's been fun to watch! The game is exciting, it's a lot more fast-paced."

Bjerke, a relative newcomer to football fandom, said there were still improvements to be made for Americans to fully embrace soccer. "We could do some better singing, though. I feel like so many countries have better songs," he said.

Nearby, business consultant Matt Movahhed described the US team as more exciting than past iterations.

"They play a more offensive style, and I think that makes me want to pay attention more -- and it probably has the same effect on other Americans," added Movahhed, 40.

Off the pitch, feel-good viral moments have also increased engagement with the tournament.

Legions of "Tartan Army" fans from Scotland roaming around Boston and Miami in kilts while adorning statues with orange traffic cones and drinking entire bars dry won over many

locals.

Thousands of Norwegian fans took over Citi Field stadium, the New York home of the Mets baseball franchise, performing their noisy trademark Viking rowing for the locals who included the team's mascots Mr and Mrs Met who joined in.

And in Kansas City, an army of Netherlands fans flocked to downtown for an "Oranje Fanwalk", creating a sea of orange captured on timelapse.

"The cultural aspects that make it more than a sporting event appeal to people everywhere," said Amy Bass, a professor of sports studies at Manhattanville University.

"People are obsessing about the matches, sure, but they're also following 'Freddy' the German fan as he shares his experiences across the American South, eating at gas stations and discovering country music."

US fan Dante Drishti, 25, who played football throughout school, said it was "great for Americans to immerse themselves in all those cultures and for visitors to immerse themselves in the American culture."

"That's what the Word Cup is all about! It's also an opportunity for Americans to discover soccer culture," Drishti said as he made his way to the Ecuador-Germany game at the MetLife stadium on Thursday.

But fellow game-goer Bryan Flaherty, 32, from Philadelphia suggested the hype would not last, insisting "it's kind of typical American behavior to jump on the World Cup bandwagon."

"In three weeks, 75 percent will have forgotten all about it," he said. The commercial impact of the tournament may not be so quickly forgotten by big business. The US opening match against Paraguay was watched by almost 25 million people according to NBC Sports, more than the average 19.6 million people who watched the first four games of basketball's NBA Finals.

Saudi Arabia's pop-up retail boom is just getting started



Business Desk

Short-term retail concepts are gathering pace across Saudi Arabia's consumer market, with over 1.5 million small and medium enterprises operating in the Kingdom. It is forecast they will increase their contribution to the country's gross domestic product from 20 percent to 35 percent by the end of this decade. The pop-up scene and experiential retail market, which is present in the food and beverages sector and has extended to the fashion and accessory space, has an estimated value of \$1.2 billion across the GCC, according to Ken Research. As this niche sector of retail booms, Ken Research points to Saudi Arabia as one of the top three key markets driving growth. While pop-ups have long been used internationally as a social media marketing concept, their growing presence in the Kingdom can be traced back to a larger shift in the retail ecosystem as a whole. For many entrepreneurs, pop-ups offer a way to leverage their brand's creative identity, reach new customers, and build a presence through the trend without the financial constraints of a permanent retail store. The niche trend offers tenancy flexibility, allows companies to bypass cyclical nature of economies, provides them with price flexibility - proving to be a malleable entryway for businesses. The rise of flash business retail concepts also reflects broader changes in the Kingdom's entrepreneurial landscape, as SMEs

continue to expand under the economic diversification goals of Vision 2030. About 38 percent of active commercial registrations by the end of Q2 2025 were youth owned, signaling an emphasis on trendy approaches to retail, according to Monshaat, the Kingdom's Small and Medium Enterprises General Authority. Additionally, around 25,000 new commercial registrations were issued in the wholesale and retail sector in the fourth quarter of 2025. In the fashion and accessory sectors, for example, the pivot to the ephemeral retail model offers a unique customer experience. It is driving demand through limited edition pop-ups that play on aesthetics and interactive tactical commerce, all while maintaining limited risk and increased support for smaller enterprises to leverage accessible spaces. A particular destination that has made space for pop-ups is Riyadh's Solitaire mall, on its roof. The outdoor venue hosts booths of diverse sectors, all bringing creative and hands-on retail experiences that are maximizing temporary spaces through the power of brand direction and social media. As founder of one of the largest pop-ups taking space on the roof, Aya Alhalek, founder of SNIM, known as the first outlet for local attire brands in the Kingdom, spoke to Arab News on the rise of pop-up culture, its importance in the retail space, and the benefits of its growing relevance. Alhalek said: "We choose pop-ups because there's always a demand for them, because it

brings together different designers and different brands, providing the customer with diverse options whether it's a British brand or an Indian brand, they are combined in one pop-up." "I think this trend is here to stay." Companies such as SNIM, which prioritize local brand presence throughout the Kingdom, say the format has become an important entry point for emerging brands looking to gain exposure and that the concept is here to stay due to the customer experience and profitability. Pop-ups are not constrained by the dynamic change of weather in the Kingdom, but rather encouraged to alter temporary installation experiences accordingly and depending on the city, Alhalek said. "We always have either indoor or outdoor options, and so they differ greatly in terms of winter or summer pop-ups but we adjust accordingly and keep them going but Riyadh is a global hub," she said. She added that "the limited time, space and social media marketing of pop-ups helps keep these going." Riyadh, in particular, has been a priority due to its ability to attract diverse and international customers to the SNIM pop-ups, which helps platform local brands on a global scale, Alhalek added. On the preference to lean into pop-up style retail alongside online availability as opposed to brick-and-mortar locations, Rasha AlWazeenani, founder of Nayya Jewellery, told Arab News: "Pop-ups usually bring together a mix of different brands, not just jewelry." "Someone might visit to shop for an abaya or another product and end up discovering our pieces along the way. That element of unexpected discovery has introduced our brand to many customers who may not have initially come specifically for jewelry." Pop-ups nurture interactive customer experiences which are increasingly relevant to shoppers and the temporary feature of a venture creates a sense of urgency, AlWazeenani said. "They provide visibility, allow direct interaction with customers, and create an opportunity for people to experience the craftsmanship and details of the pieces up close," she said. "The temporary formatting of pop-ups also allows brands to create urgency around limited collections or seasonal launches, which can drive higher customer engagement." Analysts also view the pop-up scene as an opportunity for company growth amid the uptick in online shopping and the Kingdom's expanding economy, the largest in the Arab world.



US existing home sales edge up in November as mortgage rates ease

Business Desk

US existing home sales increased modestly in November amid an easing in mortgage rates, but economic uncertainty is keeping potential buyers on the sidelines. The report from the National Association of Realtors on Friday also showed the inventory of previously owned homes fell from October to an eight-month low, limiting choices for those looking to buy. Though housing supply typically decreases heading into winter, inventory growth has slowed on a year-over-year basis, likely in response to sluggish demand. But limited supply could prevent an outright decline in home prices. "Big headwinds remain for housing market activity," said Oliver Allen, senior US economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics. "The recovery in the supply of existing homes for sale seems to have stalled over the past few months. The weak labor market will limit the number of households that are confident enough to move, and measures of affordability remain stretched." Home sales increased 0.5 percent last month to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 4.13 million units, the NAR said. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast home resales would rise to a rate of 4.15 million units. Sales surged 4.1 percent in the Northeast, which accounts for a small share of the housing market. They increased 1.1 percent in the densely populated South, but fell 2.0 percent in the Midwest, regarded as the most affordable region. Sales were unchanged in the West. Home sales declined 1.0 percent in November on a year-over-year basis. The rate on the popular 30-year fixed-rate mortgage plunged from 7.04 percent in mid-January to 6.19 percent at the end of November, data from mortgage finance agency Freddie Mac shows. It has, however, made no further improvement, averaging 6.21 percent this week. Mortgage rates track the benchmark 10-year US Treasury yield. The lower borrowing costs are being partially offset by a sluggish labor market, with the unemployment rate rising to more than a four-year high of 4.6 percent in November and annual wage growth running at its slowest pace since May 2021. With housing starts and new home sales reports for September still to be published - they were delayed by the recent 43-day federal government shutdown - economists said it was difficult to assess the housing market.



Saudi Maaden reports 156pc profit surge to \$2bn on strong commodity prices, record production

Business Desk

Saudi mining and metals company Maaden has reported a 156 percent jump in its net profit attributable to shareholders for 2025, driven by higher commodity prices, record production volumes, and a one-off bargain purchase gain. The state-backed giant posted a net profit of SR7.35 billion (\$1.95 billion) for the full year 2025, an increase from SR2.87 billion in the previous year. The firm's revenue surged by 19 percent to SR38.58 billion, up from SR32.55 billion in 2024. This comes as Saudi Arabia steps up efforts to expand its mining sector as a pillar of economic diversification, encouraging international participation and private investment to unlock the Kingdom's estimated \$2.5 trillion in untapped mineral resources under Vision 2030. In a statement on Tadawul, the company said: "Performance was led by record phosphate production, near record aluminum production, an increase in all three of Maaden's main output commodity prices." The performance was also fueled by a 60 percent increase in gross profit, which reached SR14.79 billion. In its annual results announcement, Maaden attributed the top-line growth to "higher commodity market prices for phosphate, aluminum and gold business units," as well as increased sales volumes in its phosphate and aluminum segments. This was partially offset by slightly lower sales volume in the gold unit. Maaden's CEO, Bob Wilt, hailed 2025 as a transformative year for the company, marked by strategic growth and operational excellence. "This was a great year for Maaden's strategic growth. We delivered strong financial results and sustained operational excellence across the business," he said in a statement. "This was driven by growth in production across all businesses, including record-breaking DAP (di-ammonium phosphate)volumes), disciplined cost control across and a clear commitment to our role as a cornerstone of the Saudi economy," Wilt added. Profitability was further bolstered by an increased share of net profit from joint ventures and an associate. This included a one-off bargain purchase gain of SR768 million related to Maaden's investment in Aluminium Bahrain B.S.C. The company also benefited from lower finance costs.

Business Desk

Central banks in big economies are signalling a change of stance as the Bank of Japan raised interest rates to a 30-year high on Friday. A day earlier the European Central Bank all but confirmed it was done with monetary easing and the Bank of England cut rates in a narrow vote as dissenters cautioned about price pressures. Now all eyes are on how dovish the incoming next Federal Reserve will manage to be after some of the US central bank's policymakers warned the world's biggest economy might already be running too hot. Here's where central banks in 10 developed markets stand: **SWITZERLAND** The Swiss National Bank left its policy interest rate unchanged at 0 percent on December 11, the lowest among developed-market central banks, and said the recent agreement to reduce US tariffs on Swiss goods had improved the economic outlook. Even though Swiss inflation is at zero as the strong safe-haven franc lowers import costs, the bar for bringing rates into negative territory is high, and economists expect price growth to recover mildly next year and the SNB to stay on hold throughout 2026. **CANADA** The Bank of Canada held its key rate at 2.25 percent last week, after 225 basis points of easing this cycle. Governor Tiff Macklem said the economy was proving resilient to US trade measures. The BOC is expected to keep rates on hold until 2027, after government spending and robust oil exports lifted third-quarter growth to 2.6 percent and the labour market. **SWEDEN** Sweden's Riksbank also expects previous monetary easing to begin lifting growth and with year-on-year inflation running just above its 2 percent target, it held rates at 1.75 percent on December 18 and analysts anticipate it will hike again in late 2026. **NEW ZEALAND** With unemployment stuck at a nine-year high, turning hawkish will be a tough choice for new Reserve Bank of New Zealand boss Anna Breman. With a string of punchy rate cuts having helped propel inflation to the top end of the central bank's target range, however, money markets



see New Zealand's cash rate nearing 3 percent by December 2026 from 2.25 percent currently. **EURO ZONE** The European Central Bank has been firmly on hold at 2 percent since June and its latest pause on Thursday also came with upgrades to growth and inflation forecasts. Traders settled on bets for a lengthy pause until at least June after ECB President Christine Lagarde cited heavy uncertainty and avoided forward guidance. **UNITED STATES** The Federal Reserve cut rates on December 10, in a divided vote, then hinted at a pause. Delayed jobs data showed that the labour market had declined in October, then snapped back the following month and US business leaders also expect further price rises from tariffs. Fed policymakers predict just one 25 bps cut in 2026, setting them up for potential clashes with President Donald Trump, who wants more easing, as does Fed Chair frontrunner and White House economic adviser Kevin Hassett. **BRITAIN** Bank of England rate-setters voted narrowly for a quarter-point cut to 3.75 percent on Thursday and Governor Andrew Bailey warned future easing was a close call. With UK inflation still the highest in the G7, comments

from BoE dissenters on Thursday that it may get stuck too high drained confidence out of interest rate markets for more than one 25bps cut next year. **NORWAY** The Norges Bank has been the most cautious in the G10 pack, having cut rates by just 50 bps this cycle. It held borrowing costs steady on Thursday, although futures markets anticipate 44 bps of further easing next year after inflation cooled off. **AUSTRALIA** The Reserve Bank of Australia looks close to its turning point, having held rates steady at 3.6 percent earlier this month and issued a stark warning about inflation. Markets are fully pricing a hike by June. **JAPAN** The Bank of Japan raised rates to 0.75 percent on Friday and upgraded its growth and inflation forecasts, although the yen fell sharply while Japanese government bond yields also spiked higher, sending mixed market signals about the likelihood of more hikes. Investors have been anticipating a BOJ shift away from economic support measures since new Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi pledged massive stimulus spending and as inflation remained strong enough to pile pressure on the central bank.