



Let's Not Forget Earthquake's Wake-up Call

**Will Merger Save Five
Sick Islami Banks**

**Master Plan to Protect
Saint Martin's Island**

**Mini Cold Storages
A Silver-Lining**

**Diplomats See a New
Democratic Turn**

**Bangladesh Mourns
July Uprising Hero**

**Foods We Eat Are
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Tel. 88-02-9561906, 9567177, 9553369, Fax. 88-02-9561906 E-Mail: info@bigmbd.com, shahin@bigmbd.com

Chittagong Office: 113 Shekh Mujib Road, Agrabad, Badam Toli, Chittagong, Chittagong.

Mobile: 01713067030, E-Mail: info@swadeshbigmbd.com

Editor & Publisher

M. K. Majumder

Executive Editor

Rafiqul Islam Azad

Managing Editor

Farzana Afroze Zerin

Staff Reporter

Moshiur Rahaman Rumi

Contributors

Adnan Hadi

Sadia Islam Raka

Bipul K Devanath

Gofran Palash

Mayaj Main

Business Manager

Sib Sankar Modak

Graphics in-Charge

SA Naim

Cover image credit

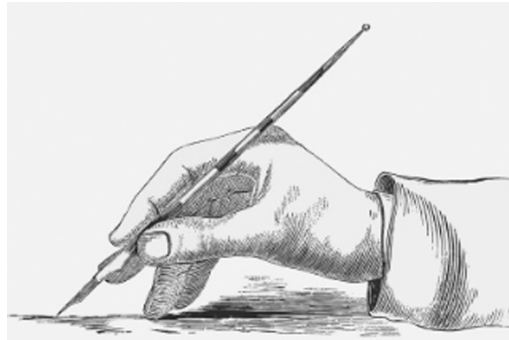
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Level 7, Room No. L1.
2. House 157, Road 7, Journalist R/A,
Block F, Mirpur 11, Dhaka 1216.
Phone No. +8801929334864,
email: infogreenwatchbd@gmail.com
editorgreenwatchdhaka@gmail.com



Emotional Farewell to a Man of the People

Such times are rare. When people grieve a man who they know represents their thoughts, emotions, glories, sorrows, hopes, despairs, expectations and reservations. He who by his spontaneous actions during and after the July Mass Upsurge managed to hit these instincts of the people is none other than Sharif Osman Hadi, spokesman of Inquilab Manch. Assassin's bullet claimed his life sending all patriotic Bangladeshis in grief and tears. Shot while he was moving in an easybike at the Bijoy Nagar area of Dhaka City on 12 December, Hadi breathed his last on 18 December at the Singapore General Hospital where he was flown to for an improved treatment. Camouflaged assassins, posing as his associates, attended his meetings sat close and talked to him, got acquainted with his movements before executing their design.

His talks, interviews, public speeches, and conversions revealed he was an ideal Bangladeshi. Still in his early thirties, Hadi emerged as a matured man at the forefront of a youth movement that first sought to end the anti-merit quota system in government jobs, then to end discrimination from the society, then unseat fascist rulers and finally to build a nation based on honesty and truthfulness. The youths of July uprising are hard core patriots, know no compromise over independence and sovereignty, rights and values. And this clearly irked those who don't want the people to live with dignity.

Hadi lovers in hundreds of thousands, coming from all over Bangladesh have bidden him an emotional farewell at the South Plaza of the Parliament building and laid him to rest beside his beloved hero Rebel Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam in the premises of the Dhaka University Central Mosque.

Nazrul has been ceaselessly inspiring people's movements for freedom from injustice. People always look at Nazrul as an icon of courage to wage war, protest and defeat misrule. A Nazrul enthusiast, Hadi sleeps near him and would shine for his fearless activism and inspire the people's cause.

Mostafa Kamal Majumder

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Let's not Forget Earthquake's Wake-up Call

Special Correspondent

Central Bangladesh, including capital Dhaka, the most densely populated megacity (population above 10 million) in the world, was shaken by a series of earthquakes over just one month.

At least 10 people, including two children, were killed and several hundred others injured after the first and the most violent tremor struck on Friday 21 November morning raising serious concerns about the city's preparedness for a major tremor.

Four deaths were reported in Dhaka, five in Narsingdi, and one in Narayanganj. In Old Dhaka's Kasaituli area, a brick-built rooftop railing collapsed, killing Rafiul Islam, 21, a student of Sir Salimullah Medical College; Abdur Rahim, 48, a fabric trader; and Rahim's 12-year-old son, Abul Aziz Remon. At least ten others were injured, many of whom had gathered to buy beef from a nearby butcher's shop.

Brig Gen Md Mazharul Islam Khan,

director of Sir Salimullah Medical College and Mitford Hospital, confirmed that the three victims were brought dead. He said around 20 others received treatment, with one requiring admission.

In Dhaka's Mugda area, a 50-year-old security guard, Md Maksud, was killed when part of a building wall collapsed on him as he attempted to flee during the tremor. He was taken to Mugda Medical College Hospital, where doctors declared him dead at around noon.

In Rupganj of Narayanganj, a 10-month-old girl named Fatema was killed when a wall collapsed on her. Her mother and a neighbour were injured and are receiving treatment at a local private hospital. In Narsingdi around 100 people were injured across Sadar, Palash, and Shibpur upazilas. Construction material falling from an unfinished building in Chinishpur union severely injured four people. Two of them were transferred to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, where eight-year-old Hafiz Omar was declared

dead. His father, Delwar Hossain Uzzal, later died from his injuries.

In Palash upazila, 75-year-old Kazem Ali Bhuiya died after his earthen house collapsed on him. He passed away while being taken to the district hospital.

Another man, Nasiruddin, 60, from Islampara Nayapara village, died after jumping from a roadside embankment in panic as the tremors began. His family did not take the body to a hospital.

In Shibpur Upazila, a man identified as Md Forkan, 40 fell from a tree due to the shaking. He was rushed to Narsingdi District Hospital and later referred to Dhaka, but died on the way.

The epicentre of the earthquake was located in Madhabdi of Narsingdi, ten kilometres below land surface.

At Dhaka Medical College Hospital, officials said 41 patients had arrived by early afternoon, including two Dhaka University students. Six were admitted while others were treated and discharged.

In Gazipur, around 100 factory workers in Tongi and Sreepur were injured while rushing out of buildings during the tremor.

A deep crack at the joint of the vital 'Matlab Bridge' over the Dhonagoda River has sparked alarm among residents and motorists, raising concerns about a serious disaster if urgent repairs are not carried out.

The bridge, which connects Matlab South and Matlab North upazilas and serves as a major route for travellers heading to Dhaka from Chandpur, Noakhali, Feni, Lakshmipur, Raipur, Ramganj and Hajiganj, sees thousands of vehicles pass over it every day. 'It wasn't there before quake.'

Experts have warned that Dhaka, the overpopulated capital of Bangladesh could become a hotspot for earthquake vulnerability, as nearly 90% of its older buildings were constructed without adhering to proper building codes.

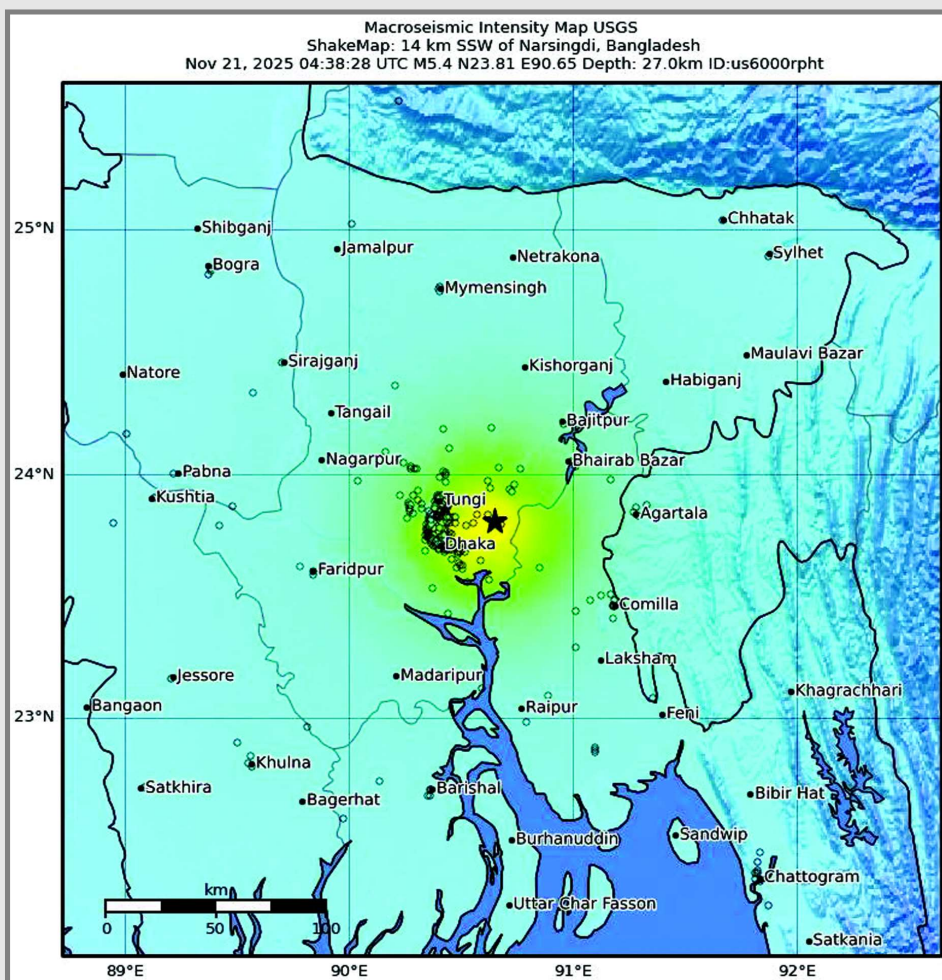
The powerful, 5.7-magnitude earthquake that struck at 10:38 am on 21 November, shattering the usual weekend calm and turning the holiday into a frightening experience for residents of the capital and those in surrounding districts.

It is rare for earthquakes in Bangladesh to result in multiple fatalities. The last time it happened was in 1999, when an intense earthquake shook the island of Moheshkhali, killing 6 people. Hundreds were also injured on the island off the coast of Chattogram in the country's south-east. Earlier the Chattogram earthquake of 1997, magnitude 6.1 caused several deaths and damage to some buildings.

But the November-21 quake was instantly recognisable as something different, with deeper repercussions. Besides the casualties being spread across three districts, the epicentre being so close to Dhaka caused an estimated 10 million people to feel 'strong shaking', according to the United States Geological Survey, which is the leading authority on earthquake data worldwide.

Closer to the epicentre in Narsingdi, about 300,000 people were projected to have felt 'high-intensity' shaking. Literally everyone we spoke to in the capital confirmed they had never felt the ground shaking like it did during Friday's quake.

It was followed almost exactly 24 hours later by a much smaller aftershock, again with its epicentre in Narsingdi's Palash upazila. The BMD reported that this quake, measuring 3.3 on the Richter scale, occurred at 10:36am on Saturday, about 29 km west of the BMD Seismic Centre in Argagaon.



And then in that evening, a third tremor in the space of 32 hours, considered a second aftershock of Friday's quake, was felt in parts of Narsingdi and nearby districts including Dhaka. According to USGS, this latest quake measured 4.3 on the Richter scale and struck at 6:06 pm local time, with its epicentre located 11 kilometres west of Narsingdi at a depth of 10 kilometres.

Even though no casualties were reported from either of the two aftershocks, they served to heighten anxiety, confirming that the fault lines lying deep beneath them in the earth's crust had become seismologically active. Several buildings across various areas of Dhaka were damaged after November 21 earthquake. According to the Dhaka district administration, at least 14 buildings in the capital sustained damage from the quake, while the Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk) put the number at over 50, including many that had tilted. For survivors, the psychological impact lingers. For many, the ground no longer feels stable, and the fear of a stronger quake currently haunts millions across Dhaka.

"I am a student of Mujib Hall (2024-2025 session). I became traumatized because of the earthquake. I live in the July

Smriti Bhaban of Mujib Hall. Now, whenever a vehicle passes by my building or I hear even the slightest sound, I panic," a Dhaka University student shared.

"It feels as if another earthquake is happening. I repeatedly check my room and surroundings to see if there is a tremor," he added.

What's an earthquake

An earthquake is the sudden release of strain energy in the Earth's crust, resulting in waves of shaking that radiate outwards from the earthquake source. When stresses in the crust exceed the strength of the rock, it breaks along lines of weakness, either a pre-existing or new fault plane.

While most earthquakes are caused by the slipping of tectonic plates, minor earthquakes can also be caused by volcanic eruptions, collapse of rock formations on Earth's surface, or underground explosions.

Bangladesh faces a high earthquake risk due to its active tectonic setting and geology, compounded by rapid, often unplanned urban development with weak building stock and unprepared populations, setting the stage for potentially catastrophic outcomes if major seismic events occur.



Bangladesh sits at the convergence of the Indian, Eurasian, and Burma plates, leading to significant seismic activity, with faults like the Dawki Fault and Arakan Subduction Zone posing threats. Cities like Dhaka rest on thick, water-saturated deltaic soil that amplifies seismic waves, worsening shaking and increasing the risk of soil liquefaction, where soil behaves like a liquid, causing buildings to sink or collapse.

The presence of active fault systems, including those beneath the capital, means pressure is constantly accumulating, increasing the chance of major quakes.

Many buildings, especially older ones in Old Dhaka, are unreinforced, non-engineered, and not built to modern seismic codes (BNBC), making them highly susceptible to collapse.

Densely populated areas, particularly megacities like Dhaka, mean more people are at risk, and there's often little space for emergency response.

Densely packed buildings with narrow streets hinder rescue efforts and increase cascading failures during a quake.

There's often a significant gap in public awareness and preparedness, despite frequent tremors and historical warnings from seismologists and disaster agencies.

Non-compliance with the Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC) and disregard for standard construction practices intensify the hazard.

Records of the Department of Disaster Management show that the last major 8.5 magnitude earthquake Bangladesh faced was the Assam Earthquake on 15 August 1950, with its epicentre 580 km away from Sylhet City.

In the 81 years preceding that severe jolt, six major earthquakes had shaken Bangladesh. Those include the 10 January 1869 Cachar Earthquake, 7.5 on the Richter Scale; 14 July 1885 Bengal Earthquake of 7.0 magnitude with epi-

centre 170 km away from Dhaka; 12 June 1897 Great Indian Earthquake of 8.7 scale, epicentre 80 km from Sylhet; 8 July 1918 Srimongal Earthquake of 7.6 scale, epicentre 150 km away from Dhaka; 2 July 1930 Dhubri earthquake, scale 7.1; and the 15 January 1934 Bihar-Nepal Earthquake 8.3 on the Richter scale.

Bangladesh's seismic history includes the powerful quakes felt from nearby regions (like Myanmar or Northeast India), but the seven tremors recorded since November 21 last had epicenters within or very close to Bangladesh borders, causing significant local effects.

Three seismic zones

Considering earthquake risk, Bangladesh is divided into three seismic zones. Among them, the high-risk areas fall under Zone-1, medium-risk areas under Zone-2, and the least-risk areas under Zone-3. A map published by the Meteorological Department identifies the earthquake-prone regions of the country.

In particular, nine districts of the Sylhet and Mymensingh divisions; parts of Tangail, Gazipur, and Narsingdi in the Dhaka division; the entire Kishoreganj district; Brahmanbaria in the Cumilla division; and large areas of the hill districts Khagrachhari and Rangamati are identified as high-risk zones.

Statistics show that between 1976 and 2015, Bangladesh experienced at least five major earthquakes. Almost all of these originated in Sylhet, Moulvibazar, Rangamati, Bandarban, and Cox's Bazar. Historically, it has been expected that these areas may also experience stronger quakes in the future.

But the rapid and unplanned development of centrally located Dhaka city in the period since independence, and its proximity to the epicentre of the weekend's tremors, are triggering renewed concerns over the fate that awaits the capital's residents.

During the inspection at three affected areas of Dhaka on November 22 last, the RAJUK Chairman Engineer Md Riazul

Islam said this earthquake was a warning for us. "If we do not take it seriously, a major disaster awaits," he warned.

He added that authorities are preparing a list of the buildings that were damaged in the quake.

The risky structures are being inspected on-site, and those found highly unsafe are being sealed or closed.

"In some cases, dangerous instAGRICULTUREallations are being removed. Unless all of us become aware and act responsibly, we may face a severe catastrophe in the near future."

Risky Buildings in Dhaka

According to RAJUK, the first list of risky buildings was prepared in 2010 and updated in 2016. Currently, Dhaka has 321 extremely risky buildings, mostly in Old Dhaka. In 2024, RAJUK also identified 30 risky buildings across 21 educational institutions.

A RAJUK survey conducted under the Urban Resilience Project between 2018 and 2022 found that approximately 865,000 buildings in Dhaka could collapse if a 6.9-magnitude earthquake struck the Madhupur Fault near Tangail. Such a scenario could result in 210,000 deaths and 229,000 injuries if it occurred during daytime hours.

Bangladesh's cities, including Dhaka and Chattogram, remain highly vulnerable to earthquakes due to widespread disregard for building codes, master plans, and land-use zoning, according to the Institute for Planning and Development (IPD).

Adil Muhammad Khan, Professor at the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at Jahangirnagar University, emphasized the urgent need for preparedness, citing the recent 7.7-magnitude earthquake in Myanmar as a stark reminder of the risks.

Experts have also expressed concern that, despite the formation of multiple reform commissions, the interim government has yet to establish a dedicated authority for planned urbanization, sustainable housing, and building safety.

Stronger Preparedness Can Halve Earthquake Losses

EARTHQUAKE Preparation

PREPARATION



Create an emergency supply kit with supplies that can last at least three days and includes emergency contacts.



Keep cash stored in case access to an ATM or the ability to pay with cards becomes limited.

Make sure to secure all important documents in a safe location.



Practicing earthquake drills with your family will ensure a quick reaction to the first signs of an earthquake.

PRACTICE

Learn what to do during an earthquake to keep your family and your pets safe.



Special Correspondent

Risks Preparedness, public awareness and the use of modern technology can significantly reduce casualties and damage during a major earthquake, experts told a seminar held in Dhaka. They warned that Bangladesh faces a high earthquake risk and that any further delay in preventive measures could lead to a major humanitarian disaster. This was stated at a seminar, titled "Earthquake Awareness, Safety Protocols and Emergency Preparedness," was organised by JCSX Developments Ltd. Two Japanese specialists in earthquake-resilient architecture - Keiichiro Sako, founder of SAKO Architects, and Hisaya Sugiyama, Principal of VERITAS Japan LLC - shared insights drawn from Japan's post-quake experiences, safe infrastructure practices and modern sustainable design standards. Speakers emphasised the urgent need to construct earthquake-resistant buildings, conduct structural audits of existing structures, strengthen monitoring of construction quality, build emergency response capacity and establish an effective early warning sys-

tem. They also underscored the importance of regular drills, community awareness campaigns and household-level preparedness plans. The experts highlighted several key steps to reduce destruction and loss of life: strict enforcement of the building code, digital approval systems, retrofitting vulnerable buildings, setting up at least 50 modern seismic stations, GIS- and AI-based risk modeling, better equipment for rescue agencies, compulsory earthquake drills in educational institutions and workplaces, mandatory soil testing, use of quality materials and greater transparency in the real estate sector. They noted that Japan has sharply reduced earthquake losses by strictly following regulations, and Bangladesh could reduce potential damage by up to 50 per cent by adopting similar practices. The need for adequate earthquake preparedness in view of seven successive tremors felt in Bangladesh since November 21 was emphasised at another open discussion organised by the Policy Dialogue Network in the capital. The open discussion attended by architects, planners and engineers plus social workers,

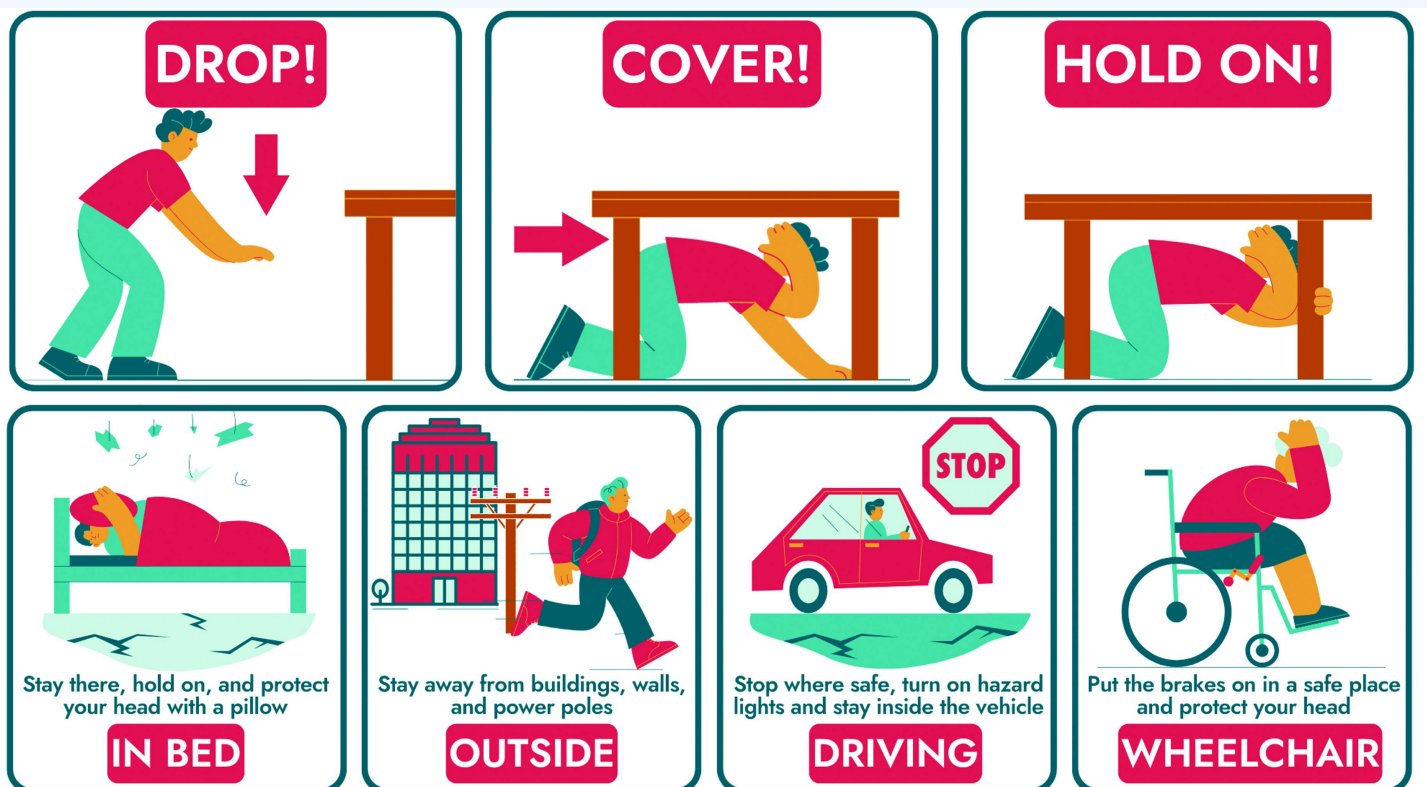
imams of mosques and political workers also called for the creation of a society and state based on moral values so that people stop encroaching water bodies and open lands making cities and towns more disaster-prone. The 5.7 magnitude quake of November 21 left clear indications of how disastrous could an earthquake of higher magnitude mean to Dhaka and other cities of Bangladesh. Abu Nayeem Sohag of the Bangladesh Institute of planners said we all should take responsibility for disasters hitting Dhaka metropolis from time to time. The fire tragedy that killed fifty people at a Bailey Road restaurant could have been avoided if the shop has an emergency exit as required by the building code. He said that children in Dhaka City suffer from repeated bouts with cold and cough as they have no exposure to sunlight due to construction of congested building leaving no space for this free source of vitamins that human body needs. Mehtaj of Prime Civil Society pointed out that although there were cyclone and food preparedness programmes, little has been done for earthquake preparedness.

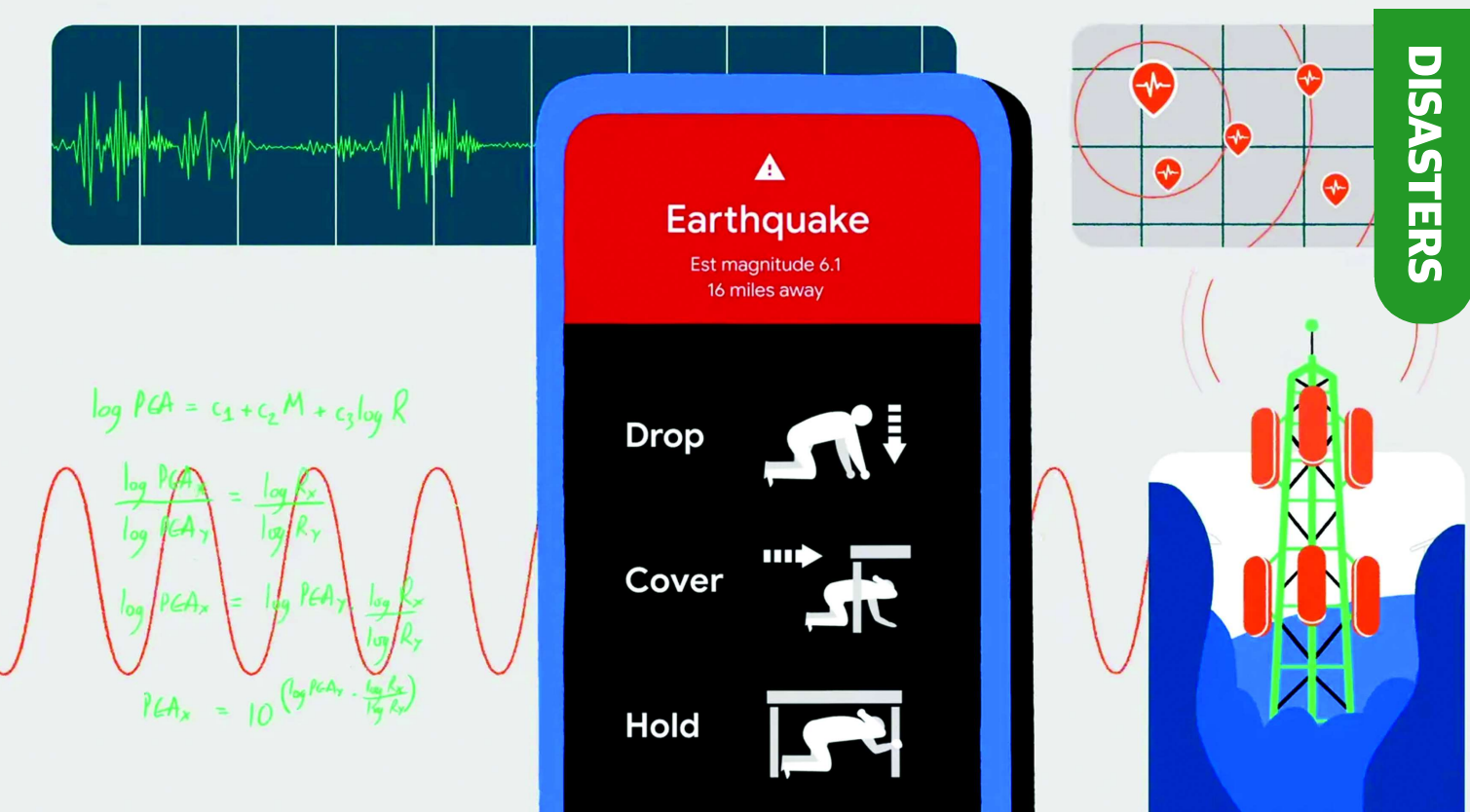
In the event of an earthquake there should be advance preparation about who should stop the supply of electricity and gas to prevent a disaster from turning into a calamity. Alauddin Quamrul Islam said that there has been little response to the statement from the Fire Service that they would not be able to undertake rescue operations in old Dhaka because of the narrow roads in the event of an earthquake. Another speaker said there has been a casual approach to the threat of earthquakes because severe quakes have not hit the country for the last three quarters of a century. After the Chattogram and Maheshkhali earthquakes of 1997 and 1999 that partially destroyed some structures and caused some deaths, the November 21 earthquake gave a severe jolt and killed 10 people making the people to think over the disaster. Six successive mild tremors that followed were also reminders that most of their origins were in Bangladesh. Mahmudul Hasan from BUET said that all constructions from now onwards should strictly follow building code. An early earthquake warning system should be devised to help people take safety measures as far as possible. The government should expedite the procurement of rescue equipment; widen narrow roads to make dwelling buildings accessible for management. All families living in buildings should have water, torch light and other equipment which would

Two Japanese specialists in earthquake-resilient architecture - Keiichiro Sako, founder of SAKO Architects, and Hisaya Sugiyama, Principal of VERITAS Japan LLC - shared insights drawn from Japan's post-quake experiences, safe infrastructure practices and modern sustainable design standards. Speakers emphasised the urgent need to construct earthquake-resistant buildings, conduct structural audits of existing structures, strengthen monitoring of construction quality, build emergency response capacity and establish an effective early warning system.

become extremely necessary in the events of an earthquake disaster, he added. A new paradigm in construction When a 9.1-magnitude earthquake struck Japan in 2011, in buildings equipped with an innovation known as 'base isolation', not even a

glass fell from the shelves. It is a construction technique in which the building (or other such establishment) is not rigidly attached to the ground. Instead, hundreds of special rubber-lead bearings are installed beneath it. When an earthquake hits, the ground may shake violently, but the building above moves gently – swaying slowly rather than shaking hard. As a result, people, furniture, equipment, and interior structures remain almost completely unaffected. Today in Japan, nearly all new towers, buildings, hospitals, schools, and data centres are required to have this system. Even 40-50-year-old buildings are being retrofitted by cutting the foundation and installing base isolation to give them a new, safer life. Some engineers recommend that Bangladesh should move in this direction to save itself from a catastrophic situation in the future. Under the Bangladesh National Building Code-2020 (BNBC-2020), important structures in Dhaka and Chattogram have already started using base-isolation systems. The Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, several metro rail stations, and a few new towers are already implementing this technology. Research results show that base isolation may be satisfactorily applied for mid-rise to high-rise buildings in Bangladesh. And the first application of base isolation to a building in Bangladesh is planned for a new headquarters of the Fire Service and Civil Defense in Dhaka.





Earthquake Alerts: Best Free Mobile Apps

GreenWatch Desk

When the ground tremor occurs without warning, safety issues often feel incomplete until mobile apps for earthquake alerts enter the picture. Bangladesh, with its long-known vulnerability to seismic pressure, has a particular stake in fast, reliable alerts. Technology is quietly reinforcing hope here, offering ordinary phone users a chance to react milliseconds earlier. Such tools may not erase the threat, yet they help people face it with clearer information and steadier nerves. Let's explore the top reliable earthquake warning apps for smartphones that could shape preparedness strategies heading into 2025-26.

Top Free Earthquake Warning Apps for Android and iOS Devices

A new wave of seismic tools is reshaping how people prepare for sudden ground shifts. Here's a quick look at the mobile apps, built to deliver faster alerts and clearer information when it counts.

MyShake Earthquake Alerts

Earthquake early warnings often feel abstract until the ground actually moves, which is why the system built into 'MyShake' tends to stand out. Developed

at the UC Berkeley Seismological Laboratory, it sends notifications for magnitude-4.5-and-up quakes a few seconds before the shaking reaches you. This is a narrow window, yet often enough to steady yourself or move away from danger.

The app has been around since February 12, 2016, and runs on both Android 9+ and iOS 12+, a broad range that keeps it accessible. Some users argue that the lead time varies a bit depending on their location. But that's the nature of seismic networks rather than a flaw in the tool itself.

Android:

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/detail?id=edu.berkeley.bsl.myshake>

iOS:

<https://apps.apple.com/app/id1467058529>

My Earthquake Alerts

People lean on quick post-event information more than full early warning systems, which is exactly where 'My Earthquake Alerts' finds its purpose. Released back on May 3, 2015, by JRustonApps B.V., it focuses on notifying users moments after an earthquake occurs.

The alerts aim for speed and clarity rather

than prediction. It's compatible with Android 7+ and iOS 15+, giving it wide appeal among everyday users. Clean, reliable data is always helpful when there are no extra layers of scientific detail.

However, some might wish for pre-shaking alerts, yet the app's strength lies in simplicity and fast reporting.

Android:

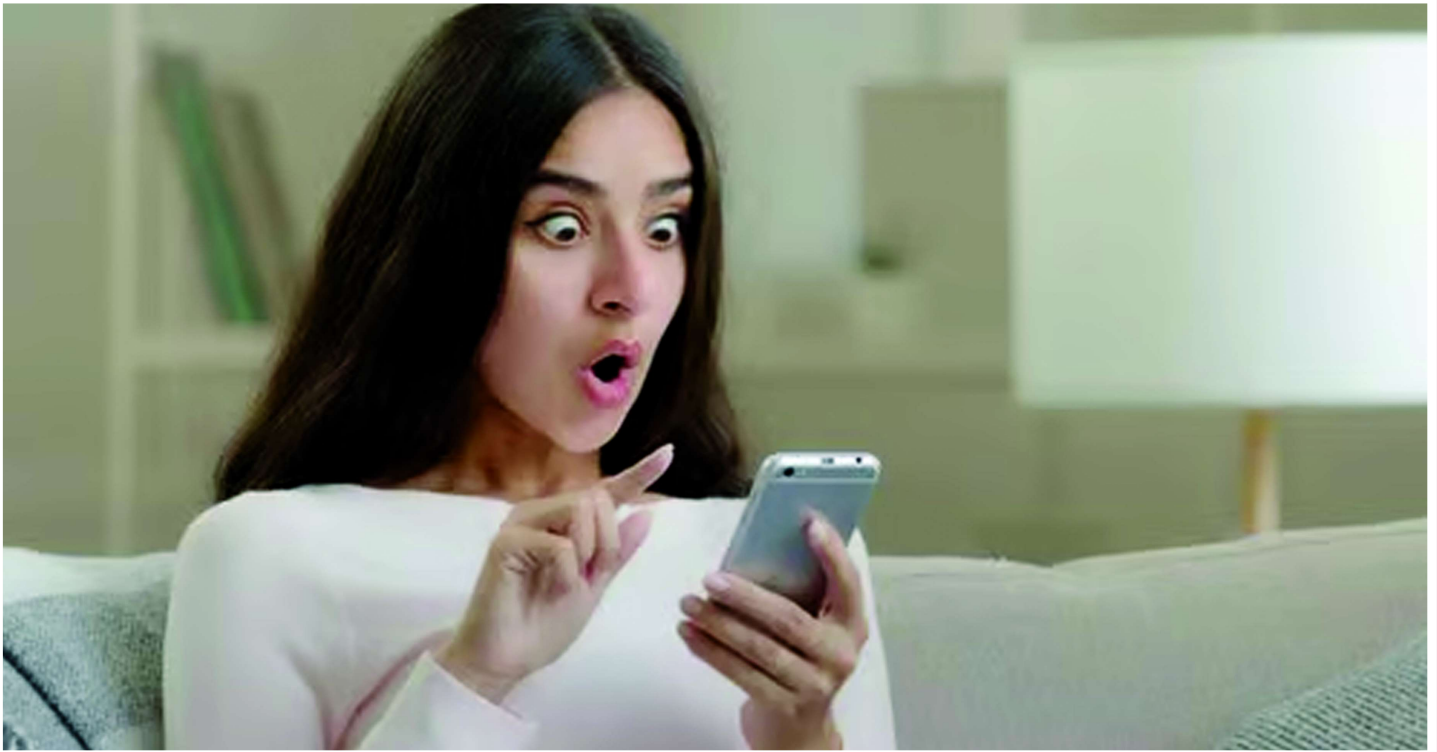
<https://play.google.com/store/apps/detail?id=com.jrustonapps.myeearthquakealerts&hl=en>

iOS: <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/my-earthquake-alerts-feed/id975709372>

LastQuake

For those who prefer understanding the broader picture rather than relying on automated alarms, LastQuake offers something different. Offered by EMSC-CSEM and shaped directly by seismologists, it gathers reports from witnesses, often the first to feel a tremor.

The information-centric approach uses mobile technologies to collect photos, videos, and rapid questionnaires. Though it doesn't function as a traditional alert system, it does allow personalised notifications based on magnitude, distance, and even voice alerts.



Running on Android 7+ and iOS 11+, and active since June 18, 2014, it has built a reputation as a crowd-powered window into how earthquakes unfold in real time.

Android:

https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=org.emsc_csem.lastquake&hl=en

IOS:

<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/lastquake/id890799748>

Android Earthquake Alerts System

Many Android users never realise their phones already carry a built-in seismic tool, one that sits quietly in the background until needed. That system, known as the 'Android Earthquake Alerts System', arrived in Bangladesh on July 19, 2022.

It was shaped with input from seismology researchers at UC Berkeley, the same group behind 'MyShake'. It works with most Android models running Android

5.0 or later, using the phone's own accelerometers to sense early tremors and warn people within range.

Alerts appear only for magnitude-4.5-and-above quakes, which keeps the noise down but leaves room for debate about smaller, still-felt events.

Anyone wanting to activate it can do so through Settings > Location > Advanced > Earthquake Alerts.

QuakeFeed Earthquake Alerts

iPhone users tend to take a different route, often turning to a dedicated platform such as 'QuakeFeed', released by Artisan Global LLC. Despite launching only in 2021, it has built a following by offering a broad spread of free features. It spans from worldwide quake mapping to hazard tracking for wildfires, hurricanes, volcanoes, and smoke.

The app supports iOS 15 and up, and focuses on customisation, nearby alerts, regional filters, a 3D globe, satellite and

street maps, and a fault-line layer for those who like to dig deeper. Some may find the interface a bit crowded, yet the range of tools makes it flexible for both casual users and detail-seekers.

IOS:

<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/quake-feed-earthquake-alerts/id403037266>

Pilling Up

These popular mobile apps for earthquake warnings are proof of how seriously digital preparedness is moving towards 2025-2026. The built-in Android quake alerts system still stands apart for its speed and freedom from third-party dependencies. Tools like MyShake, My Earthquake Alerts, and LastQuake help both Android and iOS users stay informed, while QuakeFeed rounds out the lineup for those on iOS alone. All in all, these apps continue widening the scope of how communities brace for the next earthquake.



Will Merger Save the Five Sick Islami Banks

BANKING

M Monirul Alam

A surge in bad loans has pushed five Shariah-based Islamic banks in Bangladesh into severe capital stress, triggering panic among depositor as their branches repeatedly failed to meet payment requests. The crisis, which has shaken confidence in the banking system, prompted the Bangladesh Bank (BB) to approve a plan of merger of these banks under the interim government to form 'Sammilito Islamic Bank' (Combined Islami Bank), but delays in repaying depositors continue to undermine trust in the regulatory response.

Central bank governor Dr Ahsan H Mansur disclosed the merger plan on November 5 this year, and pledged depositors of immediate paying off respective money, up to taka two lakh in one shot and same first tranche against higher amount. In reality, experts say, disbursing depositor's money must follow existing laws which has no way to make the payback possible shortly.

The five merging banks are Union, Global Islami, Social Islami, EXIM and First Security Islami banks.

These banks have 7.5 million clients and employ around 16,000 work forces. The banks too have branches, sub-branches, agent banking outlets and ATM booths across the country. Once, the banks starts new journey together, the new bank authority has to initiate branch absorption, bringing the services from split at present to a single point. Besides, a more important issue is pending with IT (information technology) which the banks adopted in cash management & security. All these actions required meeting a long procedure and it needed time. So, the depositors must wait a bit or requesting money, experts say.

Talking to GreenWatch, reputed senior banker Mohammed Nurul Amin said, "There is no way to make things in a hurry."

He noted, "A bank is a commercial firm. The government has injected equity. The people appointed to the firm have to come up with prudent plans to execute commercial operation in order to make the firm a success and sending good impression to both the government and clients so that the much-talked 'trust' is restored. If the equity is spent to repay the depositors, definitely a question will arise as to how the new



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Dr Ahsan H Mansur

bank will begin its commercial operation? And, without lending how the bank would earn? Consequently, without any earning the new bank too would turn sick. What's next then?"

"And, again... repaying depositors from the deposit insurance scheme (DIS) needs to meet legal barriers. So far, the law reads that DIS will be used to pay-back depositors only after a bank or financial company's liquidation or resolution. This way is not so easy. It must follow a legal process which requires at least a couple of years," Amin went on.

According to the new bank's chairman Dr. Mohammad Ayub Mia, only a board of directors has been appointed for the bank. A forensic auditor has been appointed too aiming to diagnose genuine financial status of the ailing five banks initiated for merger.

"We have floated an appointment notice

for recruiting a managing director. After this appointment completes, we shall move toward appointing a chief financial officer and an information technology expert for IT integration of the five banks. Before that, we can't assess the genuine strength and weakness of the banks. To pay off depositors, we need to identify them first," Ayub Mia told this reporter.

He said, "The assignment is much challenging. We shall try our best."

Asked for the five bank's active loans, assets and gross liability, he said, "I don't know yet."

Requested for that information, the central bank spokesperson Arif Hossain Khan told GreenWatch that five separate committees under a central coordination committee of BB have been working on it.

Meanwhile, the BB governor vowed for several times that the depositors of merging banks will be paid off immediately. Revealing a detail scheme, the governor told media that disbursement will begin soon. But, the reality appears to be difficult according to the insiders and exerts. This has sparked an outcry among depositors and drawn immediate criticism from financial analysts. The country is moving towards a general election in mid-February and the regulatory-side pledge of paying off the depositors is fading up amid delay in action. According to data released by central bank at end of November, the banking sector's gross non-performing loans (NPL) soared to above six lakh crore taka or 36 percent of total loans and advances. Of the amount, five merging banks together shared a one-fifth portion.

According to reports, those banks have concealed genuine information in approval and disbursement of loans and advances. As the banks do not meet compliance requirements, their management also hides information when reported to the central bank. Different media reports have revealed loan anomalies and irregularities that draw the attention of the regulator.

Factsheet: Union Bank

Union Bank has not published its full audited annual report for 2025. Its September 2025 quarterly disclosure showed Tk27, 876 crore in outstanding loans and Tk28, 718 crore in total liabilities.

The bank's former managing director Humayun Kabir told media earlier that non-performing loans exceeded 97 percent during his tenure. The bank, formerly controlled by the controversial S Alam Group, is facing a severe financial crisis after default loans skyrocketed from Tk1,000 crore in June to nearly Tk25,000 crore by December 2024.

Global Islami Bank

According to the annual financial report, Global Islami Bank reported around 50 percent classified loans, which is estimated to be Tk13,141 crore. The bank's independent director and former chairman of the board, Mohammed Nurul Amin has blown the whistle on the loan scandal. Amin revealed that the real figure had ballooned to between 87-90 percent by 2024, while the bank officially reported an NPL ratio of fewer than 3 percent in 2023.

Amin said that the bank's actual volume of NPLs was concealed. Loans that should have been classified as defaulted were kept as regular accounts to show lower defaults and inflated profits.

Social Islami Bank

As of late 2023 and early 2024, Social Islami Bank PLC (SIBL) had approximately Tk 9,568 crore in default loans, a figure significantly higher than the Tk 1,644 crore it initially reported on its balance sheet. Bangladesh Bank inspections revealed that the bank had concealed over Tk 7,900 crore in bad loans through data manipulation and deferral facilities. SIBL's default loan percentage

was reported to be around 62 percent of its total loans.

This bank reported a massive provision shortfall of Tk 20,994 crore, leading its board to withhold dividend declarations for the year 2024. The bank's 2023 financial report showed total investments (loans and advances) of Tk 36,082 crore as of December 30, 2023.

EXIM Bank

EXIM Bank (Export Import Bank of Bangladesh PLC) had a high non-performing loan (NPL) ratio of 48.20 percent as of mid-2025. The bank, which operates under Islamic Shariah principles, was run for a long time under the legacy of board chairman industrialist Nazrul Islam Mozumder. Several financial irregularities were reported by the central bank.

First Security Islami Bank

First Security Islami Bank (FSIB) suffered a severe financial crisis, mainly due to a massive surge in default loans and irregularities linked to the S Alam Group, which previously controlled the bank's board. As of September 2025, FSIB's non-performing loan (NPL) ratio reached an alarming 96.37 percent. The BB's forensic audit discovered that companies affiliated to the S Alam Group accounted for 56 percent the bank's total disbursed loans, which amounted to Tk 33,791 crore out of total loans and advances of Tk 60,272 crore, as of September 2024.





Mini Cold Storages, A Silver-lining for Bangladesh's Farmers

Rafiqul Islam Azad

For years, vegetable farmers in Bangladesh's remote and rural areas have faced a painful dilemma during peak harvest seasons: sell the perishable produce at throwaway prices or watch it rot for lack of storage. When supply floods the market, prices collapse, leaving growers with losses after months of hard work. The introduction of farmer-level mini cold storages is now offering a practical and timely solution—one that many believe could transform rural agriculture and restore bargaining power of farmers.

With a storage capacity of up to 10 tonnes, these mini cold storages allow farmers to preserve vegetables and fruits for weeks instead of days. The result is simple but powerful: farmers can wait out price slumps, avoid distress sales, and sell their produce when market conditions improve.

"We are happy that the mini cold storage will help us reduce wastage of perishable products like vegetables and fruits," said Raihan Uddin, a farmer from Singair in Manikganj who is already

using a facility. "When prices fall because of oversupply, we can store our produce. When prices rise again, we can sell it."

Raihan said the impact was immediately visible. Farmers in his area tested the newly installed storage with 16 to 17 types of vegetables and fruits. "We found vegetables can be preserved for two to four weeks, and papaya for up to two months," he said. For farmers accustomed to selling everything within a day or two of harvest, this extension is game-changing.

Raihan, who is also the general secretary of the Medulia Krishak Somonnoy Samity, provided land beside a highway for installing the cold storage through a farmers' association. He said access to the facility is free for member farmers, removing a major cost barrier. "Earlier, we had to throw away produce or sell at unfair prices because demand was low. Now, that pressure is easing," he added, noting plans to open a wholesale collection point linked to the storage unit.

Field-level observations support these early experiences. According to Project Director Talha Zubair Masrur, farmers using the mini cold storages are reduc-

ing post-harvest losses by an estimated 20 to 40 percent.

In addition, they are earning an extra Tk 8 to Tk 15 per kilogram, depending on the crop and season. A detailed impact assessment is currently underway to quantify long-term benefits.

The Singair facility was inaugurated in late August as part of a nationwide programme to distribute 100 Farmers' Mini Cold Storages under the project titled "Farmers' Income Increase Project through Expansion of Affordable Cold Storage Technology to Address Climate Change Risks." The initiative is being implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture with funding from the Climate Change Trust Fund.

The programme formally began with the handover of a unit to the Medulia Integrated Farmers' Development Association. Lieutenant General Md Jahangir Alam Chowdhury (Retired), Advisor to the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Home Affairs, attended the event as the chief guest. He described the initiative as far more than a simple distribution of equipment.

"This marks the beginning of a new chapter in agriculture," he said, noting that farmers often fail to get fair prices for seasonal produce due to storage shortages. He added that the mini cold storage technology is sustainable, energy-efficient and environmentally friendly-qualities that make it suitable for widespread adoption.

Agriculture Secretary Dr Mohammad Emdad Ullah Mian said Bangladesh has already achieved self-sufficiency in agricultural production, shifting the policy focus towards better storage, reduced losses and improved market management. "These solar-based, app-controlled mini cold storages will open up new opportunities for the agricultural economy," he said.

Designed specifically for Bangladesh's climate and farming conditions, the mini cold storage system blends locally developed components with advanced technology sourced from the United States. Two models have been introduced: a household-based system and a container-based system. Both rely on solar power and enable precise control of temperature and humidity-critical factors in preserving fresh produce.

What sets the technology apart is its simplicity and accessibility. Farmers can monitor and operate the system remotely through a mobile phone using internet-based, real-time controls. The household-based model can store up to 10 tonnes of produce at a cost of around Tk 5 lakh, while the container-based version costs approximately Tk 15 lakh. Compared to conventional cold storage facilities, which require heavy infrastructure, diesel generators and long-distance transportation, the mini version cuts overall preservation costs by around 60 to 70 percent. Installed close to farms, it also reduces transport, handling and commission expenses-savings that directly benefit farmers.

Feedback from users has been overwhelmingly positive, Masrur said. Farmers report reduced spoilage, improved product quality, lower storage costs and better prices. Many also say the technology has eased the mental stress associated with peak harvest periods, when they previously faced the risk of losing entire crops overnight.

The benefits extend beyond economics. Each mini cold storage unit is estimated to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by about 3,500 kilograms per year-equivalent to the environmental impact of planting 140 to 160 trees. By relying on solar energy and cutting waste, the sys-

tem supports Bangladesh's climate adaptation goals.

Climate resilience is a central focus of the project. High temperatures and erratic weather increasingly threaten crop quality and shelf life. "The energy-efficient, solar-supported system maintains controlled temperature and humidity, protecting produce from heat stress," Masrur said. "This significantly reduces post-harvest losses and strengthens farmers' resilience to climate risks."

According to Project Director Talha Zubair Masrur, the early response from farmers has been overwhelmingly posi-

With a storage capacity of up to 10 tonnes, these mini cold storages allow farmers to preserve vegetables and fruits for weeks instead of days. The result is simple but powerful: farmers can wait out price slumps, avoid distress sales, and sell their produce when market conditions improve

tive. "Farmers are reporting reduced spoilage, lower storage costs, improved product quality and better prices," he said. "Many have also mentioned reduced stress during peak harvest periods, which is something we often overlook but is very important."

Preliminary field observations suggest that farmers using the mini cold storages are reducing post-harvest losses. At the same time, they are earning an additional money per kilogram, depending on the crop and the season. "These are early findings," Masrur noted, "adding a detailed impact assessment is ongoing. But even at this stage, the economic signal is very encouraging."

Masrur explained that the problem the project seeks to address is structural. During peak harvest seasons, market supply exceeds demand, prices fall sharply, and farmers have little bargaining power. "They are compelled to sell immediately because vegetables and fruits are highly perishable. Mini cold storage breaks this cycle by allowing farmers to delay sales and choose better market timing," he said. "This directly contributes to ensuring fairer prices."

The rollout of 100 units is taking place in phases. Many are already operational, while others are under installation. Locations were selected based on horticultural production levels, vulnerability to post-harvest losses and limited access to conventional cold storage. Beneficiary farmers and groups were chosen through local agricultural offices using transparent criteria.

The urgency of such interventions is underscored by national data. Bangladesh produces about 25 million tonnes of vegetables annually, yet a large share is lost due to inadequate storage and handling. Researchers estimate that 30 to 40 percent of vegetables are wasted between harvest and consumption.

A study by the Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture found post-harvest losses of 20 to 25 percent in onions, 30 to 35 percent in mangoes, and 25 to 30 percent in bananas, papayas, guavas and lychees. Even staple crops suffer losses, with up to 10 percent of potatoes and 8 to 9 percent of rice lost after harvest. These losses translate into millions of tonnes of wasted food every year.

Agriculture officials believe farmer-level mini cold storages could significantly reduce this waste while stabilising market supply. Consumers stand to benefit as well, through improved quality and more consistent availability of produce. The idea of the initiative emerged after widespread farmer protests over vegetable price crashes last winter. Following guidance from the chief adviser, pilot cold storages were installed at the Rajalak Horticulture Centre in Savar-one indoors and one solar-powered unit outdoors. After eight months of testing under varied conditions, the technology was refined and approved for farmer use.

For growers like Raihan Uddin, the change is already tangible. "This is not just a machine," he said. "It gives us time, choice and dignity in the market." If expanded nationwide, mini cold storages may well redefine how Bangladesh handles its harvest-turning losses into opportunities and bringing new stability to rural livelihoods.

Bangladesh Can Rebound with Reforms

Former Poland's Chargé d'Affaires Piotr A. Opalinski speaks to GreenWatch

INTERVIEW

Humaira Binte Kabir

Former Poland Chargé d'Affaires to Bangladesh and current Programme



Director of the Asian Observatory at the Centre for International Relations (CSM), Warsaw, Piotr A. Opalinski believes Bangladesh has

the capacity to overcome its current economic challenges through structural reforms, investment in human capital and economic diversification.

Opalinski served as Poland's Chargé d'Affaires in Bangladesh from 1991 to 1997 and later as a non-resident envoy during 2008-2014. Drawing on his long association with Bangladesh, he shared his views on the country's political transition, economy, bilateral relations with Poland and regional dynamics.

The interview is presented below in a refined question-and-answer format:

Q: Bangladesh is set to hold its next national election on February 12, 2025. How do you assess the interim government's preparations?

A: The preparations appear to be moving in the right direction. A free, fair and credible election is essential for Bangladesh's democratic legitimacy. Much will depend on administrative preparedness, inclusivity, impartial oversight and transparent monitoring. If these elements are ensured, the election could restore public confidence and set a constructive precedent for future democratic processes.

Q: The student-led mass movement forced former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to step down in August 2024. How do you see the emergence of a "new Bangladesh" under Professor Dr Muhammad Yunus and youth leadership?

A: Professor Dr Muhammad Yunus brings global credibility, moral authority and a strong vision rooted in social entrepreneurship. Combined with the energy and idealism of Bangladesh's youth, this leadership holds real potential for transformative change. We are witnessing a generational shift where innovation, inclusivity and responsive-

ness to citizens' aspirations could define governance. The real challenge will be translating this momentum into effective policies with tangible outcomes.

Q: Bangladesh marked 54 years of independence in 2025. How do you evaluate its social achievements over the decades?

A: Having observed Bangladesh closely since the early 1990s, I believe its social progress has been remarkable. The country has achieved notable gains in education, healthcare and poverty reduction. Literacy has improved, maternal and child health indicators have advanced, and microfinance initiatives have empowered millions. Bangladesh's resilience in managing natural disasters is particularly impressive. While inequality and regional disparities persist, sustained focus on inclusive development and good governance can further consolidate these achievements.

Q: Many analysts say the economy was severely weakened during the long rule of the previous government. How can Bangladesh overcome its current economic challenges?

A: Bangladesh can certainly overcome these challenges. Structural reforms are essential, alongside strategic investment in human capital and diversification of the economy. Innovation and technology-driven growth will play a crucial role. Strengthening governance, fiscal discipline and transparency is also vital to restoring investor confidence and ensuring sustainable, inclusive growth.

Q: What major challenges do you foresee for the new political government in the coming days?

A: The challenges are multi-dimensional. Economic recovery, political stability, high public expectations and institutional strengthening will be key domestic concerns. At the same time, regional geopolitics will shape national priorities. Success will depend on effective policy execution, inclusive governance and trust-building with citizens, businesses and international partners.

Q: How large is the Bangladeshi community in Poland, and how do you assess its contribution?

A: The Bangladeshi community in Poland is relatively small but makes meaningful contributions. Several hundred are officially registered, though the actual number may be higher when including students and temporary workers. They are active in academia, business, healthcare and technology. Their presence enriches Poland's cultural diversity and strengthens people-to-people and bilateral ties.

Q: FDI inflows to Bangladesh declined slightly in 2023. How do you view the business environment and prospects for Polish investment?

A: Bangladesh has strong fundamentals—a young workforce, rapid urbanisation and improving connectivity. While FDI has seen some fluctuations, recent reforms in business regulation, taxation and investment facilitation are encouraging. Polish investors could explore opportunities in renewable energy, manufacturing, ICT and infrastructure. With consistent policy support and institutional stability, the long-term investment outlook is promising.

Q: Illegal migration remains a concern for EU countries. How do you see this issue?

A: Illegal migration is a complex issue requiring comprehensive solutions. Migrants are sometimes exploited in broader geopolitical contexts, such as being pushed across borders in hybrid warfare situations. Addressing the problem requires safe and legal migration pathways, tackling root causes in countries of origin, and strong international cooperation on border management. These measures protect migrants and reduce irregular movements.

Q: How do you see Bangladesh-India relations evolving in the coming days?

A: Bangladesh and India share deep historical, cultural and economic ties. I expect continued cooperation in trade, connectivity, water sharing and regional security, alongside pragmatic management of differences. Mutual respect and constructive dialogue will remain the foundation of a stable and productive relationship.



Diplomats See New Democratic Turn in Bangladesh Polls

Imtiaz Ahmed

Bangladesh is heading towards one of the most closely watched parliamentary elections in its history, with diplomats, analysts and political observers predicting a new electoral pattern shaped by shifting voter behaviour, the rising visibility of Islamic parties, and the decisive role of young voters. The 13th national election, scheduled for February 12, 2026, is also notable for the absence of the Bangladesh Awami League, long the country's dominant political force, leaving the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh as major contenders.

Political analysts and diplomats based in Dhaka believe the upcoming polls could mark a turning point in Bangladesh's democratic journey, following years of disputed elections and political polarisation. The election is being held against the backdrop of a post-uprising political transition, led by an interim government, and heightened international attention focused on whether Bangladesh can deliver a free, fair and credible vote. Bangladesh, which gained independence in 1971 through a bloody war that



Political analysts and diplomats based in Dhaka believe the upcoming polls could mark a turning point in Bangladesh's democratic journey, following years of disputed elections and political polarisation

claimed the lives of an estimated three million people, has struggled over the past 54 years to institutionalise democratic norms, ensure transparent elections and foster a culture of political accountability. Many foreign diplomats see the February election as an opportunity to reset that trajectory.

German Ambassador to Bangladesh Dr Rüdiger Lotz recently described the upcoming polls as potentially the largest democratic exercise in the world, given the sheer scale of voter participation. Speaking at a reception marking German Unity Day at the Franco-German Embassy in Dhaka, he said more than 126 million voters are expected to cast their ballots.

"With all likelihood, Bangladesh will return to the league of democratic nations in Asia and in the world," Dr Lotz said. At a time when democracy is under strain in many parts of the globe, he added, a successful election in Bangladesh would demonstrate that, in the words of Abraham Lincoln, "government of the people, by the people, for the people will not perish from the earth."

The German envoy emphasised that the impact of a credible election would extend well beyond Bangladesh's borders. "A successful democratic election in Bangladesh will have its impact far beyond the borders of your country," he said, reaffirming Germany's readiness to deepen cooperation with Dhaka. He praised the interim government for its reform efforts and stressed that ensuring a fair, free and credible election process was now the key priority. Dr Lotz also highlighted growing bilateral engagement, noting recent high-level visits from Germany and meetings between Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus and the German Chancellor. "Bangladesh is increasingly becoming a key partner in Asia and a pillar of regional stability," he said, expressing confidence that bilateral exchanges would intensify in the future. Australia has echoed similar expectations. First Assistant Secretary of the South and Central Asia Division at Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Sarah Storey, said Canberra looked forward to a free and fair election and a smooth democratic transition in Bangladesh. Speaking at the sixth round of Bangladesh-Australia Senior Officials' Talks in Dhaka, she reiterated Australia's support for the interim government and its reform agenda. Storey said Australia would extend full support to Bangladeshi expatriates to enable postal voting, underscoring the importance of diaspora participation in the democratic process. She also outlined Australia's broader priorities in its relationship with Bangladesh, including trade and investment growth, people-to-people ties, development cooperation, Rohingya humanitarian support, defence and security collaboration, and Indo-Pacific engagement. Australia, she added, is considering Bangladesh as a secondary manufacturing base for its cotton and wool industries. The European Union has also placed high expectations on the February polls. EU Ambassador to Bangladesh Michael Miller said the next general election would serve as a key channel for transmitting the aspirations of the Bangladeshi people. Speaking at the opening of the EU Film Festival 2025 at Bangladesh Shishu Academy, he stressed the importance of an inclusive and credible electoral process in reflecting popular will.

Beyond diplomatic circles, voter sentiment on the ground reflects a complex and evolving political landscape. Humaira Binte Kabir, a Basundhara resident and Queen Mary University of London graduate, said she plans to vote for a BNP candidate. Taswar Ahmad, a computer science graduate from North South University, expressed similar intentions, saying he would cast his vote for BNP's "sheaf of paddy" symbol. Others, however, remain disillusioned. Lamia Tabassum, a Dhaka University graduate who grew up in rural Manikganj, said she would skip the election altogether, citing a lack of faith in the political system. In contrast, Kaniz Fatema, a Mirpur resident educated at Dhaka



University in the late 1970s, said she would support Jamaat-e-Islami, arguing that mainstream parties had failed to meet the expectations of ordinary citizens. Diplomatic sources said foreign envoys in Dhaka, as well as Bangladeshi diplomats posted in the United States, the European Union, the UK, Canada and Australia, broadly agree that Bangladesh is moving towards a democratic transition. Development partners and major trading nations are particularly encouraged by steps to facilitate voting by expatriate Bangladeshis. Historical voting patterns underline the scale of political change. In the 2008 election, the Awami League won 230 seats with 48.04 per cent of the popular vote, while BNP secured 30 seats with 32.50 per cent. In 2001, BNP won 193 seats with 40.97 per cent of the vote,

while the Awami League took 62 seats with 40.13 per cent. Subsequent elections held in 2014, 2018 and 2024 under Awami League governments were widely criticised by academics and observers as flawed, marred by allegations of rigging and engineering. Political analysts believe a significant portion of Awami League supporters may abstain from voting this time, while others may back alternative candidates. The recent success of Islami Chhatra Shibir, the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami, in student body elections at several major public universities has also drawn attention, though analysts caution that campus victories do not always translate into national electoral success. The Election Commission has set out a detailed roadmap for the polls. Voting will take place on February 12, 2026, from 7:30am to 4:30pm. Nomination papers must be submitted by December 29, with scrutiny running until January 4. The final list of candidates and symbols will be published on January 21, and campaigning will continue until the morning of February 10. According to the Election Commission, more than 127 million voters are registered, including 1.3 million new voters. The commission has removed over 2.1 million deceased voters and added 4.4 million previously unregistered individuals. Around 128 million ballots are expected to be printed, and up to 900,000 personnel will be deployed across more than 42,000 polling stations.

Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus has welcomed the election schedule, calling it an important milestone in Bangladesh's democratic journey. He said the election and an accompanying referendum would strengthen the new path forged after the mass uprising that ousted former prime minister Sheikh Hasina. Yunus pledged full government support to ensure a festive, participatory and fair election, urging all stakeholders to treat the process as an initiative of national unity. With a median age of 26 and nearly half of young voters still undecided, according to a recent SANEM survey, the February election is set to be shaped decisively by youth participation. For diplomats watching closely from Dhaka, the vote represents not just a political contest, but a crucial test of whether Bangladesh can re-establish democratic credibility at home and abroad.



Bangladesh Mourns July Uprising Hero Osman Hadi

Special Correspondent

Entire Bangladesh plunged into grief on Saturday as people from all walks of life bade farewell to Sharif Osman bin Hadi, a frontline fighter of the July mass uprising and the spokesperson of Inqilab Manch, whose death after a week-long battle for life sent shockwaves across the country.

Hadi's funeral prayer was held at 2:30pm at the South Plaza of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban, where a massive crowd gathered to pay final respects. Students, workers, professionals, political activists and senior leaders stood shoulder to shoulder, reflecting the depth of emotion attached to a young man many had come to see as a symbol of resistance and hope. The namaz-e-janaza was led by his elder brother, Abu Bakar Siddique.

Following the prayers, Hadi's body was taken to the University of Dhaka area and later laid to rest beside the grave of National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam, beside the Dhaka University Central Mosque. His burial was completed at around 3:30pm, ending a journey that began with protest and promise and concluded

with a nation in tears.

Earlier, at around 2:30pm, members of the interim government's advisory council, including Chief Adviser, Prof Dr Muhammad Yunus joined the janaza at Manik Mia Avenue, alongside top leaders of political parties across ideological divides and prominent citizens. Their presence underscored how Hadi's death had transcended partisan boundaries to become a shared national moment of mourning.

Speaking before the funeral prayers, the Chief Adviser delivered an emotional speech. "Today, the entire country is watching," he said. "Dear Osman Hadi, we have not come to bid you farewell; we have come to make a promise. The people of Bangladesh will fulfil that promise. No one can erase you. You will live on in our hearts."

He said Hadi has left behind a message that would continue to inspire the nation, quoting Kazi Nazrul Islam's immortal line, 'Say, hero, my head is held high'. "We will not forget this mantra," he said. "With it, we will move forward and stand tall before the world. Bangladesh will be inspired by the

words you taught us."

Religious Affairs Adviser Dr AFM Khalid Hossain prayed for Hadi to be granted the status of a martyr. Referring to him as a brave son of the soil, he said Hadi had dreamed of a new Bangladesh—an equitable, justice-based state—and urged the nation to become partners in realising that vision. He also read out a brief account of Hadi's life, highlighting his role in the July uprising and his growing political influence.

Long before the funeral began, Manik Mia Avenue had turned into a human sea. Processions streamed in one after another as students and ordinary citizens poured into the area, many chanting slogans, others silently weeping. Tears flowed freely—some tried to hide them; others broke down openly. With tear-filled eyes, hundreds of thousands bade farewell to a man remembered for his raised clenched fist and uncompromising voice.

The avenue that day resembled a living portrait of Bangladesh in mourning. Several prominent student leaders and political organisers were seen sobbing uncontrollably.

On social media, tributes, poems and messages of grief flooded timelines, turning Hadi into a nationwide symbol of loss, courage and unfinished dreams.

Hadi was a potential independent candidate for the Dhaka-8 constituency in the upcoming national parliamentary election.

On December 12, after Friday prayers, he was shot while travelling by an easybike to conduct campaign outreach in the capital's Bijoy Nagar area. He sustained critical injuries and was rushed abroad for advanced treatment. After fighting for his life for seven days, Hadi died at 9:30pm Bangladesh time on Thursday 18 December at Singapore General Hospital. His death silenced a voice that had become synonymous with defiance during the July mass uprising and the subsequent political movement.

Known for his fiery rhetoric and fearless stance, Hadi had emerged as a leading face of Inqilab Manch and a member of the National Citizens' Committee formed after the uprising. The man who once spoke with a raised fist returned home in a coffin—his still body a painful contrast to the image etched in the public mind. His return became a moment of profound national sorrow, shared by family members, friends, fellow July fighters and countless citizens who saw in him their own aspirations.

His body arrived in Dhaka on Friday evening at 5:48 pm aboard a Biman Bangladesh Airlines flight from Singapore, wrapped in a bright red shroud. At Dhaka Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, senior figures from across the political spectrum were present to receive the body, including interim government adviser Adilur Rahman Khan, BNP standing committee member Salahuddin Ahmed, Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Mia Golam Parwar, Amar Desh editor Mahmudur Rahman, and leaders of the National Citizen Party.

The reception itself became a rare moment of unity, as Hadi's death brought together individuals and groups often divided by politics. Initially, plans were made to take the body directly to the Dhaka University Central Mosque so that people could pay their respects.



That decision was later revised, and the body was kept at the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases mortuary before being taken to the National Parliament complex on Saturday for the janaza prayer. In recognition of his role in the July uprising, the government observed a day of state mourning on Saturday. The national flag was flown at half-mast across the country. The announcement was made by Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus in a televised address to the nation on Thursday night, shortly after news of Hadi's death broke. He also pledged that the state would take responsibility for Hadi's wife and his only child.

Condolences poured in from all corners, including the Home Affairs and Agriculture Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Md Jahangir Alam Chowdhury, the European Union, BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, the National Citizen Party and various social organisations.

Security was tight at the airport and surrounding areas during the arrival of the body and subsequent proceedings. Multiple layers of security were deployed involving the army, airport armed police, aviation security, RAB and intelligence agencies. Additional checkpoints were set up at key access points to prevent any untoward incident.

As news of the body's arrival spread, crowds began gathering at the airport from early morning, prompting authorities to request people to maintain distance. Temporary restrictions were imposed on passenger movement, and heavy traffic congestion developed on the airport road amid the emotional outpouring.

The atmosphere of grief had already enveloped the country since Thursday night, when Hadi's death was confirmed. Protests erupted across the capital and beyond, with people chanting slogans such as "We will all become Hadi," demanding justice for his killing. Overnight demonstrations continued into Friday, accompanied by symbolic funeral prayers in absentia across the country, while mosques held special prayers for him.

However, amid the wave of mourning and protest, incidents of violence also took place. At around 11:00pm on Thursday night, some unruly groups marched to the Karwan Bazar area and carried out widespread vandalism and arson at the offices of The Daily Star and Prothom Alo, disrupting publication of both newspapers. During the unrest, New Age editor Nurul Kabir was also harassed. The journalist community strongly condemned the attacks, calling them an assault on press freedom and demanding accountability.

Despite these incidents, calls for calm and justice continued to dominate public discourse. Many protest organisers urged people to keep demonstrations peaceful and focused on legal redress.

Hadi was shot on December 12 on Box Culvert Road in the Bijoy Nagar area after Friday prayers while he was travelling by a rickshaw for campaign activities. According to allegations, the shooter was linked to the student wing of the recently ousted Awami League government.

As investigations continue, Sharif Osman bin Hadi has already entered the national consciousness as more than a political activist. To his supporters, he is a martyr of the July uprising; to the nation, he has become a reminder of the cost of struggle—and of a promise still waiting to be fulfilled.

Top 10 Percent People Control 58 Percent Wealth in BD

“ Average income per capita stands at roughly 6,100 euros (PPP), and average wealth at 30,000 euros (PPP). Female labour participation remains low at 22.3%, indicating persistent gender disparities in economic activity. Overall, inequality patterns in Bangladesh have remained broadly unchanged, with limited progress toward a more balanced income and wealth distribution.

Special Correspondent

The top 10% of earners in Bangladesh receive about 41% of national income, while the bottom 50% capture only 19%. Wealth is more unevenly distributed, with the richest 10% holding around 58% of total wealth and the top 1% nearly one quarter. The World Inequality Report 2026 that has reported this however calls this inequality in the country moderate that has shown little change over the past decade.

Average income per capita stands at roughly 6,100 euros (PPP), and average wealth at 30,000 euros (PPP). Female labour participation remains low at 22.3%, indicating persistent gender disparities in economic activity. Overall, inequality patterns in Bangladesh have remained broadly unchanged, with limited progress toward a more balanced income and wealth distribution, the report says.

The income gap between the top and bottom halves of the population decreased slightly from 22 to 21 between 2014 and 2024, suggesting stable inequality levels, the report adds. The World Inequality Report 2026 has been prepared and released on December 11 by The World Inequality Lab, Paris School of Economics, 48 boulevard Jourdan, 75014 PARIS, France.

The World Inequality Report 2026 (WIR 2026) marks the third edition in this

flagship series, following the 2018 and 2022 editions. These reports draw from the work of over 200 scholars from all over the world, affiliated with the World Inequality Lab and contributing to the largest database on the historical evolution of global inequality. This collective endeavour represents a significant contribution to global discussions on inequality. The team has helped reshape how policymakers, scholars, and citizens understand the scale and causes of inequality, foregrounding the separatism of the global rich and the urgent need for top-end tax justice. Their findings have informed national and international debates on fiscal reform, wealth taxation, and redistribution in forums from national parliaments to the G20.

Inequality has long been a defining feature of the global economy, but by 2025, it has reached levels that demand urgent attention. The benefits of globalization and economic growth have flowed disproportionately to a small minority, while much of the world's population still face difficulties in achieving stable livelihoods. These divides are not inevitable. They are the outcome of political and institutional choices. This report draws on the World Inequality Database and new research to provide a comprehensive picture of inequality across income, wealth, gender, interna-

tional finance, climate responsibility, taxation, and politics.² The findings are clear: inequality remains extreme and persistent; it manifests across multiple dimensions that intersect and reinforce one another; and it reshapes democracies, fragmenting coalitions and eroding political consensus. Yet the data also demonstrate that inequality can be reduced. Policies such as redistributive transfers, progressive taxation, investment in human capital, and stronger labour rights have made a difference in some contexts. Proposals such as minimum wealth taxes on multi-millionaires illustrate the scale of resources that could be mobilized to finance education, health, and climate adaptation. Reducing inequality is not only about fairness but also essential for the resilience of economies, the stability of democracies, and the viability of our planet.

The world is extremely unequal

The first and most striking fact emerging from the data is that inequality remains at very high levels. It illustrates that, today, the top 10% of the global population's income-earners earn more than the remaining 90%, while the poorest half of the global population captures less than 10% of the total global income.

	Income		Wealth	
	Avg. Income (PPP €)	Share of total (%)	Avg. Wealth (PPP €)	Share of total (%)
Full pop.	6,152	100.0%	30,261	100.0%
Bottom 50%	1,178	19.0%	1,422	4.7%
Middle 40%	6,084	39.6%	27,916	36.9%
Top 10%	25,466	41.4%	176,724	58.4%
Top 1%	97,029	15.8%	723,238	23.9%
Year			2014	2024
Top 10% to Bot. 50% Income gap			22.3	21.6
Female labor share			22.3%	22.3%

Interpretation: Country has a transparency index of 3/20. All values are estimated at per capita (full population) level. See glossary for all definitions of concepts and indicators.

Sources and series: wir2026.wid.world/methodology.

Wealth is even more concentrated: the top 10% own three-quarters of global wealth, while the bottom half holds only 2%. The picture becomes even more extreme when we move beyond the top 10%. Figure 2 illustrates that the wealthiest 0.001% alone, fewer than 60,000 multi-millionaires, control today three times more wealth than half of humanity combined. Their share has grown steadily from almost 4% in 1995 to over 6% today, which underscores the persistence of inequality. This concentration is not only persistent, but it is also accelerating. Figure 3 shows that extreme wealth inequality is rapidly increasing. Since the 1990s, the wealth of billionaires and centi-millionaires has grown at approximately 8% annually, nearly twice the rate of growth experienced by the bottom half of the population. The poorest have made modest gains, but these are overshadowed by the extraordinary accumulation at the very top. The result is a world in which a tiny minority commands unprecedented financial power, while billions remain excluded from even basic economic stability.

Inequality and climate change

The climate crisis is a collective challenge but also a profoundly unequal

one. It shows that the poorest half of the global population accounts for only 3% of carbon emissions associated with private capital ownership (and 10% of emissions associated with consumption), while the top 10% account for 77% of emissions associated with private capital ownership (and 47% of consumption-based emissions). The wealthiest 1% alone account for 41% of private capital ownership emissions, almost double the amount of the entire bottom 90% combined. Climate inequality is also about vulnerability. Those who emit the least, largely populations in low-income countries, are also those most exposed to climate shocks. Meanwhile, those who emit the most are better insulated, with resources to adapt to or avoid the consequences of climate change. This unequal responsibility is therefore also an unequal distribution of risk. Climate inequality is both an environmental and a social crisis.

Gender inequality

Inequality is not only a question of income, wealth, or emissions. It is also embedded in the structures of everyday life, shaping whose work is recognized, whose contributions are rewarded, and whose opportunities are constrained. Among the most persistent and pervasive divides is the gap between men and

women. Globally, women capture just over a quarter of total labour income, a share that has barely shifted since 1990. When analysed by regions (Figure 5), in the Middle East & North Africa, women's share is only 16%; in South & Southeast Asia it is 20%; in Sub-Saharan Africa, 28%; and in East Asia, 34%. Europe, North America & Oceania, as well as Russia & Central Asia, perform better, but women still capture only about 40% of labour income. Women continue to work more and earn less than men. Figure 6 shows that women work more hours than men, on average 53 hours per week compared to 43 for men, once domestic and care work is taken into account. Yet their work is consistently valued less. Excluding unpaid work, women earn only 61% of men's hourly income; when unpaid labour is included, this figure falls to just 32%. These disproportionate responsibilities restrict women's career opportunities, limit political participation, and slow wealth accumulation. Gender inequality is therefore not only a question of fairness but also a structural inefficiency: economies that undervalue half of their population's labour undermine their own capacity for growth and resilience.





Fix the Energy Sector to Rebuild the Economy

GreenWatch Desk

Businesses, bureaucracy resist renewables, dialogue told

The businesses and the bureaucracy are against removing impediments to development of the renewable energy sector by reducing reliance on fossil fuel although in policy they are all for renewables.

This was noted at an open dialogue on redirecting finance from LNG to renewable energy in Bangladesh jointly organised by actionaid and Change Initiative at local hotel on December 10 last.

Speakers at the dialogue also pointed out that although import fossil fuel contributed to the worsening of debt burden and also air pollution that reduces life expectancy of people by 5-7 years, energy transition has not been mentioned in either the July Declaration or the check lists of the political parties.

They noted that whereas the share of renewable energy rose to 51 percent in India and 46 percent in Pakistan due to consistent policies and practical actions, this remained limited to only five percent in Bangladesh due to veiled resistance to the development of the sector.

Findings of a study on redirecting Nordic investment from LNG to renewables in Bangladesh by M Zakir Hossain Khan, MD Change Initiative, Md Mofazzal Hossain and Shopnil Awal were presented at the dialogue. About 50 stakeholders including government agencies, foreign embassies, CSOs, community leaders, women's groups, academia and think tanks, renewable energy experts, private sector actors, development partners, financial institutions and

media representatives took part in it.

The study has been done in the backdrop of a great energy shift of moving from domestic gas reliance to imported LNG, which has increased the balance of payments pressure and reliance on foreign financiers. And climate champions abroad are funding fossil lock-in here exposing the risk of relying on volatile global LNG markets.

Noting the macroeconomic stress from LNG imports and idle plant capacity payments, the study shows foreign exchange draining of US\$17.6 billion on LNG imports from 2018 to 2025, and Taka 1.05 trillion paid in capacity charges for idle plants since 2009.

It shows US\$11 billion was spent on spot LNG between 2022 and 2024 with price volatility of US\$ 10 to US\$80 per MMBtu and says this amount could fund 6.5 gigawatt (GW) of solar energy.

Stating that Bangladesh is at a financial crossroads in this regard the study says, 1) every dollar invested in LNG burns forex, increases debt and locks Bangladesh into volatile markets, 2) redirecting capital to solar and wind stops the bleeding, creating permanent assets and energy sovereignty, and 3) and the Nordic Paradox must end by aligning investment portfolios with global climate commitments.

Shah Abdus Sadi, deputy secretary to the government said there is no scope to remain silent after seeing the findings of the research, yet there is a paradox as we are working on renewable policy objectives while still investing in fossil fuel. Investors' grievances are deepening as resistance to the development of the

renewables sector come from some sources. Noting some achievements like the 4.2 million solar home systems in the country now, nine renewable power projects connected to the grid and 2,224 solar irrigation systems benefitting farmers introduced, he posed a question as to whether fossil fuel-based facilities are being decommissioned while integrating renewables.

In his keynote speech Zakir Hossain Khan said that 56 percent of climate fund in Bangladesh is in the energy sector relying on fossil fuels. While reliance on imported fossil fuel increases the debt burden and worsens air pollution that reduces life expectancy while people remain ill. To reduce air pollution, we should phase out fossil fuel-based transports from Dhaka City. We should have gone all out for clean renewable energy, but we have businesses and bureaucrats who do not like this preferable energy which has by now turned into a lost opportunity. Bangladesh might turn bankrupt economically if this trend of reliance on fossil fuel continues.

Overcoming this situation is not a question of money. Generation of Taka 2,396 is possible if 10 percent carbon tax is introduced. India collects Rupees 500 per ton of carbon but we do not collect any levy. Khan called for a soul searching instead of blaming other for the present precarious situation. Bangladesh could have gone for 5000 mw of renewable energy by now. The policy and decision makers spoke of stopping the Adani energy deal, but instead they ended up giving it auto renewal.

Zakir Hossain Khan said those who would come to power after the forthcoming election should end dependence on fossil fuel and invest in renewable energy. Create a renewable energy fund and disburse the same to eligible parties. Investment in the renewable energy sector should not be obstructed on the plea of compliance with many requirements demanded by financial institutions, he said.

A representative of the European Union told the dialogue that they invest in energy technology which have become cheaper. They have allocated a fund for Bangladesh's solar and wind energy development. She underlined the need for creating incentives to make investment in the renewables sector attractive. This calls for the creation of a policy-friendly road map, she said.

A representative of the Pran-RFL Group told the meeting that the spirit of the renewable energy policy is good, but on the operating side there are high tariffs on equipment and the cost goes high. She said there is a strong resistance to private sector from coming up in the renewable energy sector.

Adina Sultana of Dina Garments said the Bangladesh Bank as well as IDCOL ask for a lot of compliance from investors and there is corruption in the process. We say we want investment but investors face a lot of obstacles, she said. Mr. Murtaza of SNB said solar energy is said to require a lot of land which Bangladesh cannot spare. But if the 42 million households in the country are provided with one KW of electricity each, generation of 4 giga watt (GW) of electricity is possible in no time. And households consume most the electricity in Bangladesh, he added.

Mr. Zahidul Alam noted the progresses that have been made in the renewable energy sector in India and Pakistan but Bangladesh's progress refined confined to 5 percent because of the machinations of some 'energy mafia'. We expected some change after the Aug 5 mass upsurge, but nothing has happened. Noting a 50 percent fall in the price of solar panels in the last six months, he urged the government to sit with stakeholders to explore the rooftop option. He sought to know why renewable energy was yet to be put under an independent division of the government.

Dr. Badrul Ahsan of Dhaka University said that the renewable energy policy is good. Still, there are gaps as it's not focussed on transition from fossil fuel to renewables. There is a gap between the policy and its practical direction.

Referring to the target of installing 3000 mw of rooftop units he said not even tendering for this has been done. He called for allowing tax rebate in the renewable energy sector.

Journalist Amjad Hossain said businessmen in the fossil fuel sector will definitely invest in the renewable energy if it is profitable. But the government does not want it. The government should ensure the transmission of power generated from renewable energy. He said that rooftop solar is more important than grid-connected solar because 56 percent of power consumption is in the homes.

Gulzar a resident from the Meghna Ghat area where a lot of power plants is located said that the owners of these plants promised them many things while taking possession of their lands but subsequently, they did nothing for the improvement of quality of life of local people.

Journalist Yamin asked how investment will come to the renewable sector if its activities are not facilitated like those in the fossil fuel sector. Private solar power generators are complaining of being asked to pay three times the transmission cost borne by the fossil fuel sector, he said.

Baizid of the Norwegian Embassy narrated his experience of bringing the biggest Norwegian solar energy company to Bangladesh. The company left after six years as it saw no prospect of doing business in the country.

Energy expert Nazmul said neither 100 percent solar nor replacement of LNG possible in Bangladesh. Regional energy development is the best solution, he said. So far, all approaches made in the energy sector have been ad-hoc. We have to prioritise things in view of the limited time and limited resources. We cannot proceed without investment. We have also to reduce wastage of energy through conservation. For instance, import of ACs without inverters should not be allowed. There should be greater awareness not to keep switches of lights, fans and ACs on unnecessarily. The setting up of new institutions is not enough. They should be empowered to work effectively, he added.

One speaker, Ms Nazneen, questioned the rationale of not allowing the production of power if the cost is 8.8 cents a unit. Calling for strengthening the power storage system during off-peak hours, she raised a question as to why import of batteries should be under 58 percent tariff.

Tarif Hasan of the EU pointed out the lack of grid readiness to handle higher power generation, both in terms of grid

capacity and transmission. Making mention of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant which is expected to start generation of power soon, he said they are working on the supply chain, the distribution chain and their efficiency.

Ms Nushrat Jahan of Dhaka University spoke from a criminology angle and said that energy governance is directly related to social stability. Planners and decision makers should take note of this and help reduce tension and instability in the society by ensuring proper governance of the energy structure.

Mr. Shafique said the power sector has become 65 percent import dependent as we have done quick fixes. Now a desired solution is needed. LNG comprise 56 percent of the total fuel imported. We had to massively increase the price of gas twice in the domestic market due to 260 percent to 270 percent price hike in the international market. Yet Taka 9,000 crore subsidy has to be given on LNG. Yet 2,700 mmcf of gas can be supplied per day as against the demand of 4,000 mmcf.

Ruhul Amin of Petro Bangla told the dialogue that they went for LNG import as they were unable to meet the demand for gas. He underlined the need for a road map to come out of this.

Mr. Nasir of Desco said 90 percent of the renewable energy generated in Bangladesh, is solar. But quality maintenance of solar energy system is poor. Contractors for maintenance of the solar energy systems are not there in the market.

Sharifuzzaman of City Bank made a plea for disbursement of foreign soft energy loans through commercial banks as is done through the Bangladesh Bank and the IDCOL (Infrastructure Development Company Limited). This would help make expansion of the sector at least costs.

In his concluding remarks M Zakir Hossain Khan lamented that we never had made dedicated efforts for renewable energy. One has to keep in mind also that from local money some people have turned billionaires in Singapore. The ghosts of energy mafias are still there and benefitting from fossil-fuel economy. If this situation continues there will be the need for another July revolution not in a distant future. Renewable energy will be facilitated if land and transmission facilities are extended to investors. We should go for this transition instead of looking for benefit from fossil fuel, he added.

Abul Kalam Azad said that energy policy that normally gives direction for work does not do the same function in Bangladesh. He posed as question as to why talk on land availability is repeated again and again before 20 percent of the capacity is reached and what we have ready at hand is prioritised.

Foods We Eat are Not Necessarily Safe



Every year foodborne diseases cause:

almost
1 in 10
people to fall ill

33 million
healthy life years lost

Foodborne diseases can be deadly, especially in children <5



420 000
deaths



Children account for
almost **1/3**
of deaths from
foodborne diseases

Special Correspondent

A joint study has found 300 types of medicines, 200 types of pesticides, and 16 types of PFAS (Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances) in 87 water and 23 fish samples collected from different parts of Bangladesh. The joint study has been conducted by joint study by Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, Agricultural University, and UMEA Sweden.

Another survey by UNICEF has on the other hand revealed that 3.5 crore children in Bangladesh are infected with lead.

These were among the findings on the situation of food safety in Bangladesh presented at a high-level meeting in the presence of Chief Adviser Dr. Muhammad Yunus at State Guest House Jamuna early in December.

At the meeting, the Bangladesh Food Safety Authority (BFSA) presented data showing the severity of the situation.

It said, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), one in ten children worldwide gets sick at least once a year due to foodborne diseases while one in three children affected by foodborne diseases dies.

Foodborne diseases affect 600 million children worldwide and 30 million children in Bangladesh every year, the BFSA said.

It said food can contain four types of contaminants: heavy metals, pesticide-biocide residues, radioactivity and bio-contaminants.

The BFSA said in the last fiscal year, 1,713 samples were tested and so far, this year, 814 samples have been tested.

In the samples, excessive levels of lead or lead chromate were found while lead was detected in 22 out of 180 samples, it added.

BFSA Chairman Zakaria who made the presentation at the meeting said, "Lead enters the human body and accumulates in the brain, liver, kidneys, bones and teeth. Since children's bones are soft, lead goes directly to the brain. As a result, children's mental development is hindered".

The study also found lead infection in 5 percent of pregnant women, he said, informing that the Environment Ministry has taken a 10-year action plan to reduce lead infection.

Officials from the food and agriculture ministries presented data about harmful substances entering the human body

through poultry, dairy products and fish.

They said that uncontrolled drugs are used in poultry farms. If antibiotics are given to chickens, they remain there for up to 28 days. If chickens are marketed before the 28 days have passed, unnecessary antibiotics can enter the human body through that chicken meat, they added.

The officials said that although precautions are taken in these matters in large institutions, some clandestine companies are secretly operating poultry farms in an uncontrolled manner, avoiding the supervision of the authorities.

One speaker told the meeting, while ensuring adequate food, sometimes the aspect of whether what we are eating is safe is being ignored. The media can play a role in creating public awareness on this issue, he said.

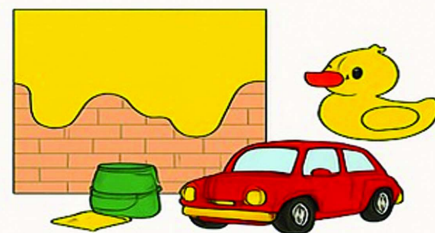
In his presentation on Safe Food and Public Health, Bangladesh Food Safety Authority (BFSA) Chairman, Zakaria said quoting from the World Health Organisation that every year food-borne diseases cause illness of one in every ten people leading to a loss of 33 million life-years.



Lead-acid battery repair and smelting



Aluminum and ceramic cookware



Lead-based paint



Spices - Turmeric adulterated with lead



Herbal medicine and amulets



Cosmetics - Lipstick, nail polish and kohl



Vegetables grown in Pb-contaminated soils



Water pipes

Source: National Strategy for a Lead-Free Bangladesh (Draft)

Foodborne diseases often turn deadly and kill 420,000 people, and children account for almost one in every three such deaths.

While 600 million which comes to 10 percent of the world population, are infected by foodborne diseases, the percentage of people infected due to this is 20 or 30 million in Bangladesh. And deaths from non-communicable diseases in Bangladesh have increased from 30 percent in 1990 to nearly 80 percent in 2024, he said quoting from World Bank findings. Premature deaths due to NCD in Bangladesh is fourth highest (50 percent) in the SAARC region.

Nutrition or diet related deaths accounted for eight percent of the total 0.83 million deaths in Bangladesh in 2021. The BSFA chairman noted heavy metal, pesticide-biological residue, radiological and chemical contaminants of food and said while the tolerable limit for arsenic was 10 ug according to WHO, the limit is 50 ug in Bangladesh. One in every 3 or 800 children in the world is lead contaminated, in Bangladesh lead-contaminated children account for 35 million, he said.

The factors responsible for lead contamination mentioned in the presentation are: lead-acid battery repair and

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), one in ten children worldwide gets sick at least once a year due to foodborne diseases while one in three children affected by foodborne diseases dies. Foodborne diseases affect 600 million children worldwide and 30 million children in Bangladesh every year.

spelling, aluminium and ceramic cookware, lead-based paint, spices-turmeric adulterated with lead, herbal medicines and amulets, cosmetics-lipsticks, nail polish and kohl, vegetables grown on Pb-contaminated soil, and water pipes.

Meanwhile, in a multi-indicator cluster survey (MICS) carried out this year, arsenic was found in blood of 38.34 percent children, cadmium in 3.82 percent, arsenic in 1.72 percent and mercury in 0.05 percent of children. On the other hand, lead was found in blood of 7.54 percent pregnant women, cadmium 3.32 percent, arsenic in 1.62 percent and mercury in 0.02 percent pregnant women.

The BFSA chairman told the meeting of their plan to test 3400 food samples from contamination-prone areas, and identify the sources of contamination to free the country from lead pollution through a combination of eight measures.

Prof. Yunus expressed grave concern over the growing presence of harmful chemicals in food resulting in public health risks. Our children, parents, and loved ones are all victims. For our own sake, we must work together to overcome this crisis, he said.



Master Plan to Protect Saint Martin's Fragile Ecosystem

Rafiqul Islam Azad

The government is set to finalise a comprehensive 10-year master plan for Saint Martin's Island aimed at curbing unregulated tourism, protecting biodiversity and restoring ecological balance of Bangladesh's only coral island. The proposed plan seeks to limit daily tourist arrivals, restrict tourism activities to designated zones and introduce a structured framework for sustainable development, following years of environmental stress caused by unchecked visitor inflows and haphazard construction.

The draft "Master Plan of Saint Martin's Island", prepared by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, proposes limiting tourist numbers to between 500 and 900 visitors per day and confining tourism activities to 4.1 kilometres of the beach within a General Use Zone. These measures are designed to prioritise conservation while allowing controlled tourism in selected areas of the island.

Environment Ministry officials say, the draft master plan has been made public to ensure transparency and encourage stakeholder participation. "We have released the draft master plan of Saint Martin's Island online and sought opin-

ions from all ministries, agencies, stakeholders and citizens," said Abdullah Al Mamun, Deputy Secretary of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change. Written feedback was requested by December 20, after which the ministry began compiling and reviewing the responses, he said.

To finalise the plan, the ministry is now preparing to hold a national-level workshop, likely on December 30 or 31, where expert opinions and stakeholder feedback will be examined in detail. Adviser for Environment, Forests and Climate Change Syeda Rizwana Hasan is expected to attend the workshop as the chief guest. "After reviewing all opinions and incorporating the outcomes of the workshop, the master plan will be finalised and declared," the official said.

Tourism pressure beyond carrying capacity

Tourism has long been the main attraction and economic driver of Saint Martin's Island, particularly during the peak season from September to April. During this period, daily visitor numbers typically range from 3,000 to 7,000, far exceeding what experts consider sustainable for the island's fragile ecosystem.

Covering an area of just 590 hectares, Saint Martin's Island lacks the capacity to accommodate such a high volume of tourists without significant environmental consequences. Over the years, excessive tourism has led to uncontrolled construction of hotels, resorts and restaurants, increased waste and sewage generation, coral extraction, habitat degradation and severe pressure on freshwater resources.

Environmental experts have repeatedly warned that the island's carrying capacity has been exceeded, resulting in a development that has crossed sustainable thresholds. The draft master plan acknowledges these challenges, noting that unplanned tourism has undermined both ecological integrity and the long-term socio-economic stability of the island's resident community.

Structured implementation over a decade

The master plan proposes a phased implementation strategy spread across short-term (1-3 years), medium-term (1-5 years) and long-term (1-10 years) actions. This phased approach is intended to allow gradual but sustained transformation of the island's tourism and conservation landscape.

The total estimated investment for implementing the plan stands at Tk 54.79 crore, according to the draft document. The allocation is distributed across programmes of varying priority levels. Twelve high-priority programmes are expected to receive Tk 19.45 crore, while three top-priority initiatives have been earmarked Tk 11.5 crore. Additionally, eight medium-priority undertakings will receive Tk 13.84 crore, and three low-priority actions have been allocated Tk 10 crore.

The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change will receive the principal share of the funding. Implementation will involve both public and private sector participation, subject to government approval and Annual Development Programme (ADP) financing for public projects. Private sector involvement is expected particularly in areas such as waste management, sustainable tourism practices, biodiversity conservation and coral reef protection. Officials say this multi-pronged approach is intended to foster coordinated, sustainable development while ensuring that conservation goals remain central to all interventions.

Addressing mounting environmental challenges

The draft master plan identifies a range of environmental and infrastructural challenges that have accumulated over years of unregulated growth. These include inadequate waste management and sewage systems, poor drainage infrastructure, uncontrolled expansion of tourism facilities, coral extraction, and degradation of marine and terrestrial habitats.

In addition to environmental degradation, the plan highlights persistent socio-economic issues such as poverty among local residents, limited alternative livelihood opportunities beyond tourism, unplanned infrastructure development and constraints in energy supply and eco-friendly transport facilities.

"These challenges have collectively placed enormous pressure on both the local ecosystem and the socio-economic fabric of the island," the draft plan notes, warning that without immediate and sustained intervention, the damage could become irreversible.

A comprehensive planning framework
The Saint Martin's Island Master Plan has been formulated as a comprehensive framework that defines the island's long-term vision, spatial configuration, growth components, business rationale and delivery strategies. It also outlines guidelines for execution, monitoring and inter-agency coordination.

The strategy combines tangible interventions, such as infrastructure upgrades and conservation projects, with intangible measures, including capacity building, awareness programmes and institutional strengthening. Equal emphasis has been placed on socio-economic development and sustainable natural resource management, reflecting a shift away from tourism-centric planning towards an ecosystem-based approach.

Following an assessment of community concerns and development priorities, the plan identifies nine key sectors, under which 26 targeted programmes have been designed for implementation by relevant agencies.

The nine sectors include: Sustainable Tourism Management, Conservation of Fish Resources and Benthic Communities, Protection of Coral Resources and Associated Flora and Fauna, Conservation of Turtles and Nesting Sites, Terrestrial Flora and Fauna Development and Preservation, Waste Management, Groundwater Management, Enhancement of Internal Road Communication and Green Infrastructure, and Livelihood Improvement Initiatives.

Each sector contains specific programmes aimed at balancing environmental protection with community welfare and economic resilience.

New travel guidelines reinforce conservation goals

The proposed master plan aligns with the government's recently introduced strict travel guidelines for Saint Martin's Island, issued by the Ministry of Environment on October 22. Under the new rules, daily tourist arrivals have been capped at 2,000, with additional restrictions on overnight stays.

According to the guidelines, overnight stays are prohibited in November, while limited overnight stays are permitted in December and January. These seasonal controls are intended to reduce pressure on the island during sensitive ecological periods.

Single-use plastics have been banned, and seasonal closures have been introduced as part of broader eco-friendly measures. Under the 12-point guidelines, the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) is prohibited from allowing any vessel travelling to Saint Martin's Island without prior approval from the Ministry of Environment.

Tourists are also required to purchase tickets online through a web portal recognised by the Bangladesh Tourism Board. Each ticket must include a travel pass with a QR code, without which the

ticket will be deemed invalid. The digital system is intended to enhance monitoring, prevent overcrowding and improve compliance with visitor limits.

The island was reopened to tourists on 1 November, after a nine-month closure, with authorities stressing that all visitors must strictly adhere to the new regulations.

Balancing conservation and livelihoods
While conservation remains the central focus of the master plan, officials emphasise that protecting local livelihoods is equally important. Thousands of island residents depend directly or indirectly on tourism for income, making a complete shutdown is neither practical nor socially viable.

Instead, the plan aims to promote low-impact, eco-friendly tourism, diversify income sources and create alternative employment opportunities for local communities. Livelihood improvement initiatives are expected to play a key role in reducing dependency on mass tourism while improving long-term economic stability.

Environmental experts and civil society groups have broadly welcomed the draft plan, describing it as a long-overdue step towards safeguarding the Saint Martin's Island. However, many have stressed that effective implementation, strict enforcement and sustained political commitment will be crucial to its success.

Towards a sustainable future

As the government moves towards finalising the master plan, expectations remain high that the proposed measures will mark a turning point for Saint Martin's Island. If implemented effectively, the plan could help restore degraded ecosystems, protect coral reefs and marine life, and ensure that tourism no longer comes at the cost of environmental destruction.

Officials say the final document will reflect stakeholder feedback and expert recommendations, with the aim of creating a realistic, enforceable roadmap for the island's future.

"With this master plan, we want to ensure that Saint Martin's Island remains ecologically intact while allowing responsible tourism and sustainable livelihoods," a senior ministry official said.

Once finalised and formally declared, the 10-year Master Plan of Saint Martin's Island is expected to serve as the guiding policy framework for all future development and conservation efforts on the island-signaling a decisive shift from unregulated exploitation to planned, sustainable management.

Traditional Pithas Keep Winter Flavours Alive



Sadia Islam Raka

As winter settles gently over Bangladesh, a familiar aroma begins to rise from village courtyards, riversides and roadside corners. It is the smell of rice flour steaming, date palm jaggery melting, and earthen stoves burning slowly at dawn. For generations, winter has been the season of pithas - Bangladesh's traditional handmade cakes that are as much a cultural expression as they are a culinary delight.

From rural villages to the bustling streets of Dhaka, traditional cakes such as chittoi, bhapa pitha, puli pitha, patishapta and nakshi pitha return every year, reviving memories of home, harvest and heritage. Once largely confined to rural households, these cakes have now found a wider audience, gaining popularity in urban centres and even creating new livelihoods in remote villages.

Roots in agriculture and the seasons

The history of Bangladeshi traditional cakes is deeply linked to agriculture and the rhythm of rural life. Most pithas are made from rice flour, coconut and molasses-ingredients that are readily available after the aman rice harvest. Winter, with its dry weather and abundance of fresh rice, becomes the ideal season for preparing these cakes.

In earlier times, pitha-making was not a commercial activity. It was a social ritual. Women of the household, joined by neighbours and relatives, would gather early in the morning to prepare cakes.

Clay stoves were set up in open courtyards, rice was soaked and ground, and date palm sap collected at dawn was boiled into fragrant gur (jaggery). The process itself was a celebration, strengthening social bonds and passing down skills from one generation to the next.

Chittoi and bhapa: simplicity and soul

Among the most popular traditional cakes is chittoi pitha, a simple rice cake cooked on a flat pan with a lid. Soft and spongy, chittoi is often eaten with lentil curry, mashed potato, meat gravy or sweetened coconut. Its versatility makes it a favourite across social classes, from farmers to city dwellers.

Bhapa pitha, another winter classic, is steamed rather than fried or baked. Made from rice flour and filled with coconut and jaggery, it is wrapped in cloth and cooked over steam. The moment the cloth is unwrapped and steam escapes carries a sense of nostalgia for many Bangladeshis, reminding them of childhood winters and village kitchens.

Vapa puli or puli pitha, stuffed with coconut and gur, reflects a slightly more elaborate tradition, showcasing the creativity and patience involved in pitha making.

Art, identity and regional flavours

Bangladesh's traditional cakes are not uniform; they vary by region, community and occasion. In northern districts, chitai and bhapa dominate winter mornings, while southern regions are known

for coconut-rich varieties. Nakshi pitha, intricately designed and fried, is often prepared for special occasions such as weddings or religious festivals. Its patterns are considered a form of edible folk art.

Historically, pitha also carries symbolic meaning. They are prepared during Nabanna (the harvest festival), weddings, childbirth celebrations and religious events. Offering pitha to guests is seen as a sign of hospitality and abundance.

From village homes to city streets

For many years, urbanisation and changing lifestyles have threatened these traditions. Busy city life leaves little time for elaborate home cooking, and younger generations grow distant from rural customs. However, in recent decades, traditional cakes have made a strong comeback.

During winter, temporary roadside stalls appear across Dhaka and other major cities. From early morning to late evening, vendors sell fresh bhapa, chittoi and patishapta pithas to office workers, students and passers-by. These stalls have become seasonal landmarks, drawing crowds eager to enjoy authentic flavours at affordable prices.

At the same time, restaurants and cafes have begun including traditional cakes in their winter menus, sometimes with modern twists. Yet, for many, the simple roadside stalls remain the most authentic experience.

New opportunities in rural areas

Interestingly, the revival of traditional cakes is not limited to cities. In recent years, people in remote villages have started preparing pithas not only for household consumption but also for sale in local markets. Improved communication, local demand and small-scale entrepreneurship have turned pitha-making into a source of seasonal income.

Women, in particular, are at the centre of this transformation. Using traditional skills passed down through generations, many rural women now supply cakes to nearby towns or sell directly in village bazaars. This has helped preserve culinary heritage while providing economic empowerment.

In some areas, community-based initiatives and local fairs promote traditional cakes, attracting visitors from neighbouring regions. Social media have also played a role, allowing small producers to showcase their products and connect with cus-

tomers beyond their immediate locality.

A bridge between past and present

The enduring popularity of Bangladesh's traditional cakes lies in their emotional connection to identity and memory. In a rapidly modernising society, pithas serve as a bridge between past and present, rural and urban, tradition and change.

For elderly villagers, winter cakes recall a slower, more communal way of life. For younger generations, they offer a taste of heritage that might otherwise fade away. Even for city-born children, biting into a warm bhapa pitha can spark curiosity about village roots and family history.

Preserving a living tradition

Despite their popularity, traditional cakes face challenges. Rising prices of raw materials, changing food habits and the decline of date palm sap collection threaten some age-old practices. Preserving this culinary heritage

requires conscious effort-through documentation, cultural festivals, and encouraging younger people to learn the craft.

Schools, cultural organisations and media can play a role by highlighting the cultural value of pithas, not merely as food but as an expression of Bangladesh's rural soul.

More than just cakes

Bangladesh's traditional cakes are more than seasonal delicacies. They tell stories of harvests and hospitality, of women's labour and communal joy, of resilience and continuity. Each winter, as steam rises from cloth-wrapped bhapa pithas and chittoi sizzles on hot pans, the country reconnects with a tradition that has survived centuries.

In every bite lies a reminder that progress does not have to erase the past. Sometimes, it can be as simple-and as satisfying-as sharing a handmade cake on a cold winter morning.





Kartalab Khan Mosque: A Masterpiece of Architecture

Adnan Hadi

Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, is a city where mosques are scattered throughout the streets of this city.

Dhaka has been known as a city of mosques since the Mughal era. Alongside newly built structures, many centuries-old mosques still stand proudly across the capital. Few places in the world can match such a dense concentration of mosques within a single area. To truly experience this "city of mosques," one must venture into Old Dhaka, where magnificent mosques adorn nearly every locality.

The Mughal rulers, who showed immense devotion to constructing mosques, left behind masterpieces of architecture—each mosque representing unparalleled artistic excellence. Among these, the Karatalab Khan Mosque holds a prominent place as one of Dhaka's most famous Mughal-era mosques.

In 1832, George Henry Walter, the then magistrate of Dhaka, recorded in an official report that the city had 153 mosques. The number continued to rise in the following years. Although mosque construction saw a slight slowdown in the 19th century, it took a new architec-

tural direction during the Pakistan period. With the Muslim population forming an overwhelming majority, the pace of mosque construction accelerated in later decades. According to the Islamic Foundation Bangladesh, the 400-year-old city of Dhaka is now home to nearly 10,000 mosques.

Dhaka served as the Mughal capital for almost a century (1608-1717), and many of the city's identifiable ancient monuments date back to that period. Among the architectural heritage left by the Mughal, Company and British periods, the most prominent surviving structures belong to the Mughal era. The Karatalab Khan Mosque stands out as one of its finest and most enduring creations.

Begumbazar lies just across Nazimuddin Road in Old Dhaka, a neighbourhood steeped in 300 to 400 years of history. Often described as a paradise for traders, the area bustles with wholesale markets where everything from daily essentials to luxury goods is sold. People from all over the country crowd its narrow alleys throughout the day.

At the entrance of Begumbazar stands the historic Karatalab Khan Mosque, popularly known among locals as the

Begumbazar Jame Mosque. Moving a little farther down the road of Dhaka's old central jail, the five-domed, two-storey mosque becomes immediately noticeable. For more than three centuries, it has remained a proud architectural landmark of the area.

The mosque was founded by Nawab Murshid Quli Khan, whose birth name was Muhammad Hadi. In 1700, Emperor Aurangzeb honoured him with the title "Kartalab Khan." Between 1701 and 1704, Murshid Quli Khan built the mosque, which later took on the name Karatalab Khan Mosque in recognition of its founder.

Surrounded once by lush greenery, this nearly three-and-a-half-century-old mosque features five beautifully proportioned domes, making it a distinguished heritage monument of Old Dhaka.

One of the mosque's most striking features is its baoli, a stepped well used for storing water. Such baolis are commonly found in North India or the Deccan, but are extremely rare in Bengal, making this mosque architecturally unique. The lower level of the structure contains several rectangular chambers, which over time have been occupied by local shopkeepers and market traders.

A kitchen market was built, endowed to meet the expenses of the mosque. In 1777, the control of the market was taken over by Lovely Begum daughter of the then Naib-e-nazim Sharfaraz Khan. The name of the locality 'Begumbazar' originate from her name. For this reason, the Karatalab Khan Mosque is also widely referred to as the Begumbazar Mosque. The mosque underwent several phases of reconstruction in the past and now having further renovation work. The madrassa has been shifted from the mosque.

Rajib Uddin Ahmed, secretary of the Mosque Committee, said the mosque was originally built by Murshid Quli Khan during his tenure as the governor of Dhaka. Construction took place between 1701 and 1703.

In his book "Kaler Sakshi: Dhaka", eminent historian Ahmed Hasan Dani observes that "the architectural progress achieved after the Shayestakhani era is clearly reflected in the construction of this mosque." He identifies three principal attributes of its design.

The first is its five-domed plan-departing from the conventional three-domed layout typical of Mughal-era mosques. The second is the addition of a chamber on the northern side, built with a canopy resembling the traditional Bengali dochala roof, thereby blending Mughal architectural elements with indigenous Bengali house forms. The third is the presence of a stepped well on the eastern lower side of the structure. Dani notes, "Such wells with descending steps are no longer found in Bengal; yet they were quite common in North India during the Muslim period." The well has since disappeared; had it survived, it would have remained a rare example of its kind.

No other mosque in Bangladesh combines these three architectural features, making the Karatalab Khan Mosque an exceptional monument in the country's Islamic architectural heritage.

Today, this historic mosque is managed by the Waqf Estate.

Over the past 25 to 30 years, the mosque has seen significant expansion and renovation. While the original structure has been preserved, additional sections have been refurbished and the overall prayer space has been enlarged.

Kartalab Khan alias Murshid Quli Khan - Subehdar of Bengal in 1717

Very little is known about his family and parenthood. Haji Shafi of Ispahan brought him up in Iran and gave him useful education. After Haji Shafi's death, he entered the Mughal service in India as diwan and faujdar of Golkonda. When Mughal emperor Aurangzeb was looking for an honest and efficient diwan for Bengal, his choice fell on this

young man. He was transferred to Bengal in 1701 as diwan and was honoured with the title of 'Kartalab Khan'.

In 1703, Kartalab Khan visited the emperor in the Deccan where he got the title of 'Murshid Quli Khan' and an elevation in rank. The emperor also allowed him to rename Makhshudabad as Murshidabad after his new title.

According to Banglapedia, after Aurangzeb's death in 1707, the Mughal Empire was in turmoil and faced dismemberment. Bengal was, at that time, being governed by absentee governors through their deputies. Murshid Quli Khan was recalled from Deccan in 1710 and became the deputy subehdar, on behalf of the absentee son of Farrukh Siyar, and then, after his death, of the absentee subehdar. But he continued to stay at Murshidabad. Being the highest officer present in the station, the control of affairs in the province fell in his hands. He was raised to the post of nazim of Bengal in 1716. He was loaded with titles. He secured the imperial title of "Motamul-ul-Mulk, Alauddowla Jaffer Khan, Noseri Nasir Jang (Guardian of the country, promoter of the State, Helper in War, the Defender). He transferred the capital of the province from Dhaka to Murshidabad in 1717 and reigned over Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.

He was true to his salt and did not yield to pressure, he didn't allow the East India Company to purchase more villages around Calcutta even after the company's receipt of the imperial farman. Murshid Quli Khan was also a good builder. Kartalab Khan's Mosque/Begam Bazar Mosque at Dhaka and the Murshidabad Mosque bear his name. He also opened a mint and introduced the "Zurbe Murshidabad" coin. In private life, he was extremely religious and never deviated from the path of shariat. After a successful tenure of office, he died in Murshidabad on 30 June 1727.

Structure of Kartalab Khan Mosque

A large majority of the extant Mughal mosques in Dhaka are of the rectangular three-domed type. The type was so much popular that outside Dhaka also they are found to have been built at every nook and corner of Mughal Bengal.

Of the other varieties of Mughal mosques in Dhaka mention may be made of a type consisting of a single rectangular hall covered with five domes above - a large central dome and two other smaller ones on its either side in the same line, which correspond respectively to the large central square bay and the flanking smaller rectangular bays below.

Kartalab Khan Mosque (1700-04) on the Begumbazar Road is the lone example of

the type, which seems to be a development of the three-domed style set by the Lalbagh Fort Mosque (Fig. 5) or Khwaja Ambar Mosque (Fig. 4) cited above. An earlier example of the type is the Tenga Masjid of Iswaripur (c. early 17th century) in Satkhira. But here in the Satkhira example all the five bays, unlike those of Kartalab Khan Mosque, arc each an independent walled-up square apartment but connected by axial doorways.

The design of the mosque is quite fascinating. The mosque, with a do-chala annex on the northern side built on high vaulted terrace, is entered from the east through five arched doorways. There was a stepped well to the north east of the platform to provide water for ablutions. In course of time the well became filled up with filth and later shops were built on it. The interior of the original mosque, forming a large elongated hall (25.60m by 5.18m), is divided into five bays by four transverse arches of plain four-centred design. The central bay is square and bigger than a couple of smaller rectangular ones on either side. Underneath the platform are a series of rectangular rooms that are let out to shopkeepers. The approach to the mosque is on the east of the platform by a flight of steps. The western wall is internally recessed with five semi-octagonal mihrabs.

The Karatalab Khan Mosque has a special importance for its architectural features. The Karatalab Khan Mosque is one of the architectural monuments, especially mosques, of the Mughal period that still survive throughout the country and is unique.

The mosque holds particular significance for its distinctive architectural character. Among the Mughal-period monuments that still stand in Bangladesh, the Karatalab Khan Mosque occupies a unique position for its rare structural features.

The Begum Bazar Mosque is a listed heritage structure under the Department of Archaeology, yet it suffers from years of neglect. There is not even an official signboard identifying the historic site. Over the centuries, the mosque has undergone several rounds of renovation. Eminent historian Muntasir Mamun writes in "Dhaka: Smriti Bismriti Nagari" that the first major renovation was carried out by Dhaka's landlord, Mirza Golam Pir. During a later phase of restoration, the original ground-floor well was filled in, altering part of the mosque's early architectural character.

(Adnan Hadi is a senior journalist mainly writing on archaeological sites and sports. He can be reached at: adnan-greenblack1987@gmail.com)

Table Tennis Stars Fear for Future Despite Landmark Success

SPORTS



Adnan Hadi

Bangladesh Table Tennis team recently returned home from the 6th Islamic Solidarity Games, Saudi Arabia with five medals - one silver and four bronzes - a modest haul on paper but a landmark achievement for the nation's table tennis fraternity.

Star paddlers Javed Ahmed and Khoi Khoi Marma clinched the silver medal in the mixed doubles event where 41 countries took part, surpassing the country's previous best performances of bronze medals in team events at the South Asian Games.

In the 53-year history of the Bangladesh Table Tennis Federation, no pair had ever climbed this high on the international stage. Recognizing the moment, the Bangladesh Table Tennis Federation (BTTF) recently held a press conference at BOA Auditorium held a formal reception for Khoi Khoi Marma recently, celebrating what officials described as a "turning point" for the sport.

However, yet behind his triumphant smile, Javed and Khoi Khoi Marma pair carried a quiet worry that overshadowed the moment of glory.

Speaking with media, neither Javed Ahmed nor federation officials hid their frustration. Alongside the joy of an international triumph, Javed expressed their disappointment at the absence of

recognition and the longstanding struggle to progress without adequate training facilities.

"My expectation is that, based on the success at the Islamic Solidarity Games, the Bangladesh Table Tennis Federation should ensure better facilities for all players-whether the support comes from the government or from corporate sponsors. If table tennis is to move forward, it has to be given the facilities it needs. Bangladesh is still lagging behind on the international stage, and the only reason is the lack of proper support. If we receive good facilities, I am certain that Bangladesh can achieve even greater success in the future." Javed told media.

"The most important thing is that we have already proved that we can succeed in big events. That means it is possible for us. But first, we need security in our lives. Those who train regularly, who represent Bangladesh, who play for the national team-they all deserve proper facilities. Without support, no athlete will want to continue for long." He added.

Federation General Secretary Maqsood Ahmed Sonnet announced a cash award of Tk 1 lakh each for the medal-winning duo on the occasion but he admitted, however, that the federation had hoped to host a grander ceremony with a larger reward - plans curtailed by the federa-

tion's current financial constraints.

However, the current ad hoc committee of the Bangladesh Table Tennis Federation has frequently made headlines since assuming office-sometimes for skipping competitions, sometimes for players' agitation. Yet, amid these controversies, two paddlers have stood firmly in defence of the federation: Javed and Khoi Khoi Marma. But their memorable success was literally overlooked by the Ministry of Youth and Sports where it mattered most.

According to the players, the Ministry of Youth and Sports has shown little interest in their accomplishment. "If the government does not respond after success, athletes lose motivation," they lamented.

Though they and their families are happy, and the federation is proud, the lack of state recognition has left them emotionally bruised. Neither athlete has received a phone call or message from the ministry.

But Athletes who won bronze and silver in Asian Archery-without gold-received Tk 10 lakh each. On the same day Bangladesh beat India in an Asian Cup football match, the ministry proudly announced a Tk 2 crore bonus. The national football team exited the tournament early, eliminated with two matches still in hand, yet the reward stood firm.



In contrast, medal-winning performers from other disciplines continue to be overlooked, their achievements buried under selective enthusiasm. "We may smile, but inside we are deeply hurt," said Khoi Khoi Marma and Javed Ahmed. Their historic silver shines brightly-but the shadows cast by neglect are equally hard to ignore.

"Look at countries like Malaysia and China-their players have jobs alongside playing. They receive salaries from their federations. They also have sponsors supporting them. That is why they are able to train 7-8 hours a day, which we cannot. They are ahead of us because of these advantages. We cannot train 8 hours every day because we do not receive any salary from the federation. So, facilities are the very first requirement if we truly want to achieve success," Javed said.

Around 70-80 percent of the country's top table tennis players have grown up under the guidance of the Narail Table Tennis Academy. Known as the birthplace of table tennis in Bangladesh, Narail's contribution to the sport is unmatched. Yet, despite its glorious legacy and decades-long journey, the district still lacks a modern training centre. There are no fixed salaries or allowances for trainers, and the largest "player-producing factory" of Bangladesh table tennis continues to run against countless odds.

From Ansar to the Army, Abahani to Sheikh Russel-every major national team features athletes from Narail. Since 1979, Narail players have dominated the country's table tennis scene. Kazi Mustafa Gayes Atiq was the first to break into the national team from Narail. After him came a long line of champions:

Mostafa Billah, Mahbub Billah, Soma, Saleha, Rumi, Edison, Gautam, and Javed Ahmed. Today, rising stars like junior champion Oishi Mou and promising youngster Nahin Khan are carrying that legacy forward.

For Javed Ahmed, the silver medal carries a different weight. Known for his activism within the sport - often vocal about fair selection, ranking transparency, and athletes' rights - he has battled frustration both on and off the table.

"I love table tennis very much. There are no players in my family, but I started playing in our small town of Narail. Table tennis is a tradition in Narail, and many stars have come from there. I consider myself fortunate to be one of them. Our senior Narail players-Mahbub Bhai and Mostafa Bhai-are now our coaches. Manash Da is also here. It is because of their inspiration that I have been able to come this far. And table tennis is a popular sport; there is great potential here," Javed said.

Bangladesh marched into the quarterfinals with a commanding win over Guyana, before the Javed-Khoi Khoi duo sealed a semifinal berth by defeating the Maldives. Under tournament rules, a spot in the last four ensures at least a bronze medal, but the Bangladeshi pair went further, overcoming Bahrain 3-1 to reach the final.

Though Bangladesh eventually fell to powerhouse Turkey in the title decider, the team still carved a new chapter in the nation's table-tennis history by securing the silver medal. The medal-winning contingent returned home on November 14, landing in Dhaka at 3:30 pm to a warm reception.

Coach Mustafa Billah, a former national TT player and the BKSP coach who guid-

ed the pair during the Islamic Games, described the result as "unprecedented." "Bangladesh table tennis has never achieved something of this scale," he said. "The players were sincere, disciplined, and determined. Their dedication shows in this success."

"This achievement didn't come in a day," Javed said. "It reflects years of effort, perseverance, and experience. We always give our best for Bangladesh - none of this happens with one lucky click."

At the ceremony, the medallists spoke candidly about the challenges they continue to face. They urged the federation to improve access to training facilities, especially ensuring that venues remain available for leagues and tournaments - an issue that has long hindered Bangladesh's TT development.

Bangladesh's historic TT silver marks a moment of pride - but also a reminder of the gaps that remain. As the federation seeks to build on this breakthrough, the voices of its athletes make one thing clear: the journey to international success is possible, but only with sustained support at home.

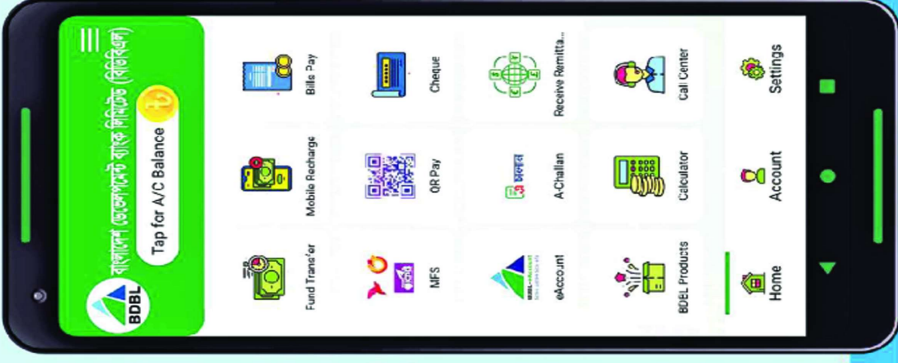
Bangladesh table tennis has touched an unprecedented milestone. The red-green paddlers have carved their names in history by winning a silver medal on the international stage-an achievement once thought distant for the sport. Yet behind the smiles, celebrations and congratulatory messages lies a deep, persistent concern: can this success be sustained?

(Adnan Hadi is a senior journalist mainly writing on archaeological sites and sports. He can be reached at: adnan-greenblack1987@gmail.com)

ডিজিটাল ব্যাংকিং-এর সকল সেবা

সেবাসমূহ

- মোবাইল অ্যাপস
- ইন্টারনেট ব্যাংকিং
- ই-একাউন্ট (নিজের একাউন্ট নিজে করি)
- ডেবিট কার্ড



২৪/৭ এখন বিডিবিএল এ

- বিকাশ ও নগদে টাকা পাঠান ফ্রিতে
- NPSB এর মাধ্যমে মুহূর্তেই টাকা পাঠান অন্য ব্যাংকে
- ক্রেডিট কার্ডের বিল পে-করুন
- ইএফটিএন ও আরটিজিএস সেবা নিন
- এ চালান সিস্টেম (ACS) এ আয়কর, ভ্যাট, ট্যাক্স ও পাসপোর্টের ফি জমা দিন
- NESCO, DPDC ও BGDCL এর বিল সেমেন্ট করুন
- সকল অপারেটরের মোবাইল রিচার্জ করুন



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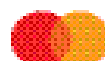
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