

DAILY BANGLADESH WATCH

21 May 2026

Takeaways

Politics

- ◆ **PM days BNP govt will begin work on Teesta Barrage too:** Prime Minister and BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party) Chairman Tarique Rahman on Wednesday said the BNP government will start work on the Padma Barrage and Teesta Barrage projects. **“I want to clearly state that this BNP government will begin work on the Padma Barrage and, InShaAllah, also on the Teesta Barrage.** Under the leadership of today’s Disaster Management and Relief Minister, BNP carried out various programmes regarding the Teesta issue. Therefore, if anyone has worked, delivered, and prepared the ground, it is the BNP,” he said. Stating that the government has already decided to construct the Padma Barrage in the country’s northern and southern regions, especially on the Padma River in Rajshahi, he said, **“Over the border, barrages are being built and water is being diverted in different ways, while we receive less water during the dry season.”** **“We want to construct this barrage so that people and farmers in our country can get water on time during both monsoon and dry seasons,”** he added. Tarique Rahman warned about another issue caused by the Farakka Barrage, saying: **“Another serious issue is that sea water is entering the southern region because of the Farakka Barrage. As a result, salinity is increasing in areas, including the Sundarbans.** Many plants are being damaged, while various animals are becoming extinct”. **“Therefore, we must construct the barrage and preserve excess monsoon water for use during the dry season,”** the premier added (*Prothom Alo*, [21 May 2026](#)).
- ◆ **Fakhrul slates Jamaat over 1971 role, Jamaat denies allegations:** At a reception programme in Thakurgaon, Fakhrul alleged that certain groups and political parties kept trying to mislead people through propaganda and misinformation. **‘Some individuals, groups and parties are trying to confuse people by spreading falsehoods and propaganda, claiming that BNP do not want to implement the July charter, whereas it was we who formulated the July charter and initiated the reforms,’** he said. **‘I want to make it clear that the people of this country will never bring Jamaat to power because they opposed our independence in 1971, killed freedom fighters and violated our mothers and sisters,’** he said. In a statement, Jamaat secretary general Mia Golam Parwar condemned Fakhrul’s comments. **Rejecting Fakhrul’s claim that Jamaat would never come to power, Parwar said the party had secured a place in the hearts of millions of people and had previously been elected to parliament through public support. ‘Jamaat has always played the role of a vigilant guardian of the country’s sovereignty and independence and will continue to do so in the future,’** he said. Responding to the allegation that Jamaat weaponises religion in politics, Parwar said that the party was a constitutional, ideological and religion-based political organisation (*New Age*, [21 May 2026](#)).
- ◆ **Unicef warned interim govt repeatedly before measles crisis exploded:** The United Nations Children’s Fund repeatedly warned Bangladesh’s interim government about an impending vaccine shortage through multiple letters and high-level meetings, cautioning that delays in procurement decisions could trigger a major health crisis -- months before the country plunged into its deadliest measles outbreak in decades. **Speaking at a press conference in Dhaka on Wednesday, Unicef Representative to Bangladesh Rana Flowers said the agency sent at least five or six formal**

warning letters between 2024 and February 2026 while also holding around 10 meetings with government officials over fears of vaccine supply disruptions. “I sat with the interim adviser and the staff on at least 10 occasions saying, ‘We are worried. Look at my face. I am worried. You’re going to face a mountain,’” Flowers said. **Her remarks come as Bangladesh struggles with more than 60,000 measles infections and at least 481 deaths this year, the country’s worst outbreak in recent history.** According to Unicef, the crisis deepened after delays emerged in vaccine procurement decisions during the interim government period (*Dhaka Tribune*, [20 May 2026](#)).

- ◆ **Left Unity demands for the trial of all advisers of the caretaker government:** Harun Chowdhury, president of the Democratic Left Alliance, sharply criticized Dr. Muhammad Yunus, chief advisor of the caretaker government, saying, **‘If Dr. Yunus and his associates are not tried in the country’s regular courts, they will be tried in the people’s court in front of this press club. As long as they are not tried, they will not be allowed to go abroad.’** He demanded that all advisers be brought under the law for the killing of children and the recent chaos in the country. Harun Chowdhury said these things at a human chain organized in front of the National Press Club (*Kaler Kantha*, [20 May 2026](#)).
- ◆ **Discussion, controversy surrounding Mahfuj’s post on return of Awami League:** A Facebook post by former interim government adviser Mahfuj Alam claiming that the Awami League—which had its activities banned after the July mass uprising—has effectively “come back” into Bangladeshi politics has sparked wide discussion and criticism. **In his lengthy post yesterday, Mahfuj Alam wrote, “The League is not merely a political party; it is a theology, and faith in that theology has returned. Today I will tell the story of how it returned.”** Some people, centering on the post, have brought up allegations of financial scandals involving certain former advisers of the interim government. Others have questioned why Mahfuj Alam did not resign from the interim government at the time if he is now criticising that same government. **Mahfuj Alam made the Facebook post about the return of the Awami League at a time when leaders and activists of the party and its affiliated organisations have been discussing the “Return 2.0” of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina, who was ousted from power during the July uprising, on social media. In addition, some Indian media outlets have recently published interviews with Sheikh Hasina.** On the same day Mahfuj Alam made the Facebook post about the Awami League’s return, adviser on Information and Broadcasting Affairs to Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, Zahed Ur Rahman, said during a regular press briefing organised by the Ministry of Information at the Secretariat, “We will also ensure justice for Sheikh Hasina. If Sheikh Hasina returns to Bangladesh, we will not subject her to any extrajudicial action” (*Prothom Alo*, [20 May 2026](#)). [The list of reasons for League’s return according to Mahfuz listed [here](#).]
- ◆ **“Awami League was already there, what has ‘come back’ is their arrogance:”** Amid discussions over a Facebook post by interim government adviser Mahfuj Alam regarding the “return” of the Awami League, another adviser, Professor Asif Nazrul, has also commented on the matter. **In a post published on his Facebook page on Wednesday afternoon, Asif Nazrul wrote, “The Awami League has not come back; they were already there. What has come back is their arrogance, falsehoods, and audacity to mislead people.”** Netizens are finding differences between Mahfuj Alam’s remarks and Asif Nazrul’s post regarding the return of the Awami League, whose activities are currently banned (*The Daily Star*, [20 May 2026](#)).
- ◆ **“We want Hasina to return and face legal proceeding:”** Social Welfare and Women and Children Affairs Minister A Z M Zahid Hossain has said the present government wants ousted autocratic ruler Sheikh Hasina to return to the country and face legal proceedings. **Professor Dr.**

A Z M Zahid Hossain said the country witnessed on August 5, 2024 what real courage means. “We also want to see that. The people of Bangladesh are eager to see it. If she has courage, she should come, appear before the court and face the cases. There is no force or coercion here. If the court declares her acquitted, then she will be acquitted. There will be no problem,” he said. The minister said he personally believes that Sheikh Hasina should return to the country, surrender herself before the judiciary and show respect for the rule of law. The minister said the present government maintains a zero-tolerance policy against corruption and no irregularity would be tolerated under any circumstances (*BSS News*, [20 May 2026](#)).

Economy

- ◆ **Stakeholders reject proposal to raise electricity price in BEREC hearing:** Politicians, business leaders, and consumer rights activists on Wednesday strongly opposed a proposal by the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) to increase bulk electricity tariffs by Tk 1.20 to Tk 1.50 per unit, warning it would further burden consumers and industry. The opposition came during a public hearing organized by the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) at the Krishibid Institution Bangladesh (KIB) auditorium in the Farmgate area of the capital. **Stakeholders questioned the project selection, transmission losses, and high infrastructure costs of the Power Grid to highlight that the organisation is already wasting money. The hearing also revealed that the government provided around Tk 40,000 crore in power sector subsidies in the last fiscal year. The Power Division has sought an additional Tk 20,000 crore for the current fiscal year, potentially raising the total subsidy burden to Tk 60,000 crore.** BEREC Chairman Jalal Ahmed said the commission would carefully review all submissions, feedback, and technical evaluations before announcing a final decision on the proposed electricity tariff adjustment (*Dhaka Tribune*, [20 May 2026](#)).
- ◆ **Govt. expects for 10 mmcf/d gas from Kamta-2 well:** State Minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Anindya Islam Amit today inaugurated drilling of an appraisal-cum-development well at Kamta Gas field, Gazipur. **It is expected that about 10 million cubic feet daily (mmcf/d) of gas could be added to the national grid after the drilling and testing of Kamta-2 well completion, Amit said while inaugurating the drilling.** Bangladesh Gas Fields Company Limited (BGFCL) under Petrobangla has been implementing the drilling activities expected to be complete in six months. According to the project details, the ECNEC approved the project on February 2 at an estimated cost of Tk.1,255 crore, of which the government will finance Tk. 872.20 crore while the BGFCL Tk. 382.80 crore. Under the project, three wells will be drilled at Titas field and one at Kamta field, foreign consultants will be appointed, construction of gas gathering pipeline in Titas and installation of process plant in Kamta, along with ancillary works (*BSS News*, [20 May 2026](#)).
- ◆ **Bangladesh plans to export 'organic meat' within three years:** Bangladesh is going to export “organic meat” produced by feeding cattle with completely natural and nutritious grass without any genetic modification within the next three years, Fisheries and Livestock Minister Mohammed Aminur Rashid has said. Addressing a seminar in Dhaka on Wednesday, the minister emphasised safe and nutritious food, which he said is becoming very important globally as genetically modified food is not bringing good results. **Claiming that the government is giving the highest priority to the country's agricultural and livestock sectors, Rashid said through research, a modern cultivation method of Napier grass with 18 percent protein has already been developed. Describing the high-protein and drought-tolerant grass as a breakthrough in the livestock**

sector, he said it would play an important role in producing high-quality animal feed at low cost (bdnews24.com, [20 May 2026](#)).

Foreign Policy

- ◆ **Shama launches Bangladesh, Morocco bilateral B2B platform:** Bangladesh and Morocco have launched their first- ever bilateral business-to-business (B2B) platform in Rabat, aiming to boost trade, investment and green industrial cooperation between South Asia and Africa. State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shama Obaed Islam formally inaugurated the platform on Tuesday during her two-day official visit to Morocco, describing the initiative as a new corridor for commerce, innovation and sustainable growth, said a foreign ministry's press release here today. **"The platform is established to catalyse high-value, innovation-driven and people-centred partnerships, not trade for trade's sake, but trade that builds industries, creates jobs, accelerates technology transfer and drives sustainable growth on both sides,"** Shama said in her inaugural remarks (*BSS News*, [20 May 2026](#)).
- ◆ **Brazilian envoy calls on Minister Amin Ur Rashid:** Brazilian Ambassador to Bangladesh Paulo Fernando Dias Feres met with Fisheries and Livestock and Agriculture Minister Mohammed Amin Ur Rashid at the latter's office in the Bangladesh Secretariat here. **The meeting discussed various issues, including bilateral trade potential and trade expansion in the fisheries, livestock, and agriculture sectors between the two countries. Matters related to Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) certification, international standards concerning animal health, food safety, and plant health were also exchanged. Both sides highlighted the vast potential for strengthening bilateral cooperation in the livestock sector and held productive discussions on various issues of mutual interest.** When the Ambassador raised the issue of importing meat from Brazil, the Minister stated that before implementing such an initiative, it is essential to further develop the necessary infrastructure, preservation systems, and cold supply chain (cold chain) in the country. He added that if a written proposal is received from the Brazilian government or relevant authorities, a decision would be reached after discussions with relevant stakeholders and necessary reviews (*BSS News*, [20 May 2026](#)).
- ◆ **US vows deeper Dhaka ties at National Day celebration:** US Ambassador to Bangladesh Brent T. Christensen reaffirmed Washington's commitment to strengthening economic, energy and security cooperation with Bangladesh as the United States celebrated its 250th independence anniversary in Dhaka. Finance and Planning Minister Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury attended the programme as the chief guest. **In his remarks Finance minister Chowdhury said Bangladesh is looking forward to deeper engagement from American investors and institutions, including the US International Development Finance Corporation, particularly in infrastructure, energy, digital connectivity, logistics and services sectors. He said that Bangladesh welcomed increased American investment and stronger supply chain cooperation between the two countries.** Speaking at the US National Day celebration, Ambassador Christensen said the United States and Bangladesh were advancing a "mutually beneficial partnership" through expanded trade, investment, aviation and energy cooperation. **Referring to the recently signed Agreement on Reciprocal Trade (ART), the envoy said the arrangement would help preserve Bangladesh's access to the US market with competitive tariff facilities while promoting balanced trade and investment relations between the two countries. He said the agreement reflected a "common sense" approach to diplomacy where both nations pursue policies serving their own people while identifying areas of shared benefit.** Highlighting growing

aviation cooperation, Christensen referred to the recent aircraft deal between Boeing and Biman Bangladesh Airlines, saying the partnership would contribute to the modernization of Bangladesh's civil aviation sector through aircraft supply, pilot training and technical development. The ambassador also mentioned the recently signed Bangladesh-US memorandum of understanding on strategic energy cooperation, saying the deal would facilitate energy projects, industrial growth and fuel diversification in Bangladesh. Christensen said the United States had also been working closely with Bangladesh on health security issues, including measles vaccination campaigns and emergency response initiatives. The ambassador announced several public outreach initiatives marking America's 250th anniversary, including the launch of 50 red-white-and-blue themed rickshaws in Gulshan and Banani, an "American Founders Museum" at Centrepoint Mall, and an "America Week" road show across Dhaka, Chattogram, Rajshahi and Sylhet in July (*BSS News*, [20 May 2026](#)).

- ◆ **UN, partners appeal for \$710.5mn for Rohingya as return hopes fade amid funding crunch:** The United Nations (UN) and its partners have launched a joint appeal for \$710.5 million to meet the critical humanitarian needs of Rohingya refugees and their Bangladeshi host communities for 2026, warning that hopes for an imminent return to Myanmar are rapidly fading. The 2026 update of the Joint Response Plan (JRP), rolled out on Wednesday at the UN House in Dhaka, outlines a "scaled-down, hyper-prioritised" strategy targeting 1.56 million people. **The new financial appeal is 26 percent lower than the budget sought in 2025, representing only the bare minimum required to sustain life-saving operations amid a global crunch in humanitarian funding. The appeal is supported by 98 humanitarian partners, including 52 Bangladeshi organisations** (*bdnews24.com*, [20 May 2026](#)).
- ◆ **Bangladesh reaffirms commitment to UN peacekeeping:** Bangladesh views peacekeeping as a profound moral responsibility to humanity, Shama Obaed Islam, State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh, said this at the Second Ministerial Conference on Peacekeeping in a Francophone Environment held in Rabat on Wednesday morning. **"Under the leadership of Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, Bangladesh continues to view peacekeeping not merely as an obligation, but as a profound moral responsibility to humanity," she said.** Reaffirming Bangladesh's unwavering commitment to multilateralism, the State Minister underscored the country's standing as one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping operations, said a press release issued by the Foreign Ministry on Thursday (*Prothom Alo*, [21 May 2026](#)).

Security

- ◆ **India's aggressive policy in Bangladesh's internal affairs has reached a new level:** In the quarterly report of 2026 (January-March) published by the human rights organization 'Odhikar' on May 20, a terrifying picture of state oppression, political violence, and continued aggression from neighbouring India has emerged. **On BSF Atrocities on the Border and India's Propaganda, the report says that India's aggressive policy and propaganda regarding Bangladesh's internal affairs have reached a new level. According to Odhikar, 1 Bangladeshi was killed and 2 were injured by the BSF, and at least 17 were illegally pushed back. In addition, allegations have been raised against Indian media and social media for spreading anti-Bangladesh rumours and misinformation.** There has even been an incident where Bangladeshi cricketer Mustafizur Rahman was excluded from the IPL based on false information. **Among its many recommendations include taking strict measures to stop political violence, prosecuting those involved in extrajudicial killings, addressing mismanagement in prisons, and taking a strong stance against India's hegemonistic behaviour** (*Amar Desh*, [20 May 2026](#)).

- ◆ **BSF pushes in 9 Bangladeshis through Sylhet border:** Border Security Force of India pushed nine people, including children and women, into Bangladesh through a border point at Goainghat upazila in Sylhet late on Tuesday night. Border Guard Bangladesh 48 Battalion commander Lieutenant Colonel Md Nazmul Haque confirmed the incident of push-in by the Indian BSF. He said that a patrol team of Pratappur border outpost of the BGB detained nine people at around 11:30pm immediately after they were pushed into the Bangladesh territory by the BSF through pratappur border. **The BGB officer also said that based on the statement extracted from the detainees, one suspected human trafficker, Al Amin, was arrested later from Hajipur Bazar near the Protappur border outpost. He said that the detainees admitted in the primary questioning that they crossed over to India with the help of Al Amin and other human traffickers.** ‘The Indian police picked them up from different parts of India and then pushed back to Bangladesh,’ the BGB officer said, adding that the detainees, including Al Amin, were handed over to the Goainghat police (*New Age*, [21 May 2026](#)).

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