

A tragic reminder of student insecurities

Killers of Primeasia student must be brought to justice

We are shocked to learn of the killing of Jahidul Islam Parvez, a third-year student of Primeasia University, who was stabbed to death in broad daylight on Saturday. That a young life could be so brutally cut short over something as trivial as a "suggestive" exchange of laughter is both heartbreaking and alarming. According to media reports, Parvez and some friends were having snacks near the university in Banani when a quarrel broke out after some individuals questioned their alleged mocking of two female students. Although the situation seemed to have been resolved with the intervention of university officials, Parvez was fatally stabbed shortly afterwards. Police have since arrested three individuals, while eight were sued in a case filed by the victim's cousin.

Among the accused are two leaders of the Banani thana unit of the Students Against Discrimination (SAD) platform, which prompted rival Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) leaders—who claimed Parvez as one of their own—to accuse SAD of orchestrating the attack. The SAD, for its part, denied the allegation, accusing Chhatra Dal of exploiting the tragedy for political purposes. This war of words has been distracting, but it does add to the conversation surrounding political violence in the country. Just last month, at least 23 people were killed and 733 injured in over 97 incidents of political violence, according to the Human Rights Support Society. These figures are a sobering reminder of the uphill battle law enforcement faces in containing crimes in post-uprising Bangladesh.

What worries us most is the continued vulnerability of general students, even though the political lines on university campuses have been redrawn following the July uprising that ended the long dominance of Awami League's now-banned student wing. The fact that the three individuals arrested by police are only 19 years old also indicates young people's growing inclination towards violence. The activities of teen gangs, in particular, have been a source of concern in recent years, with many—including students—being lured by the promise of quick power and easy money. This is an alarming trend that demands urgent intervention.

At this stage, we don't know the exact identity or motive of Parvez's killers. But it is paramount that those responsible be brought to justice through a fair and transparent trial, both for the sake of his grieving family and the safety of general students. A university should be a place of learning and growth, not a battleground for gang activities, petty quarrels, or political vendettas. Government authorities, university administrations, political parties, and society at large have a collective responsibility to ensure that our students can study and grow without fearing for their lives.

Spare residents from road-digging hassles

Projects requiring road excavation must comply with rules

Dug-up roads in our cities are not just a temporary inconvenience as they often pose risks to pedestrians and commuters. Take Banani Road-8, for instance. It connects Banani Road-11 to the Mohakhali-Gulshan road, providing commuters a way to escape the busy, traffic-heavy New Airport Road. Since April 18, it has been dug up right down the middle for drainage work, leaving no room on either side of the road for any vehicles to pass except for daredevils on motorbikes. Even pedestrians are facing difficulty using the road, as the sides of the trenches are becoming muddy and slippery from frequent summer showers. With nearby slum children playing in the area, an accident is just waiting to happen.

For residents of Dhaka and Chattogram, such unsafe road conditions have almost become a part of daily life. In the port city, the situation is worse as open drains and canals along roadsides claim a life or two every year. Yet, the city corporations and other public authorities do not appear to be bothered by these horrific, untimely deaths. Not only do they not jump into action to make the roads safer, they continue to allow unsafe roadworks, often in violation of the 2019 Road Excavation Policy.

The policy specifically mentions "protection measures" and "trench plans," but we hardly ever see the use of barrier tapes, traffic cones, or other more modern protection measures to visually warn or restrict pedestrians from these hazardous conditions. In some areas, for example in Purba and Paschim Rajabazar, road digging has been going on for more than a year. According to one resident, there's always an alley or a street that is excavated in that neighbourhood. This happens because there's hardly any coordination between the various agencies that take permission from the city corporations to carry out projects involving road digging. The question is, do city corporations even consider the inconvenience to residents before permitting road excavation?

Inefficiencies, lack of an effective accountability mechanism, corruption, and bribery are often the reasons behind our cities' failure in governance. We hope that the recommendations made by the local government reform commission in this regard will help create a more accountable system where residents' comfort and safety are prioritised in all city plans and projects. City authorities must spare residents from the nuisance of dug-up roads.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY



Paris Agreement signed

On this day in 2016, more than 170 countries signed the Paris Agreement on climate change, a landmark treaty that sought to control and reduce greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere. It took effect in November 2016.

EDITORIAL

Policy choices for Bangladesh amid rising gas prices



MACRO MIRROR

Dr Fahmida Khatun
is executive director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).
Views expressed in this article are the author's own.

FAHMIDA KHATUN

The Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) recently announced a 33 percent increase in gas prices for new industrial and captive power consumers. The tariff for new industrial connections rose from Tk 30 to Tk 40 per cubic metre, while captive power users saw the rate increase from Tk 31.5 to Tk 42 per cubic metre. This hike is likely to affect energy-intensive sectors, such as textiles and RMG, ceramics, steel, fertiliser production, and power generation. Industries will encounter increased production costs, reduced competitiveness, and pressure on profit margins. This could potentially lead to reduced industrial output and have a negative impact on the overall economic health. For instance, the textile and RMG sector, which contributes to export earnings, relies extensively on natural gas. Higher gas costs will increase production costs, which will make Bangladeshi exports less competitive globally, particularly against regional competitors such as Vietnam and Cambodia, which also export apparel products.

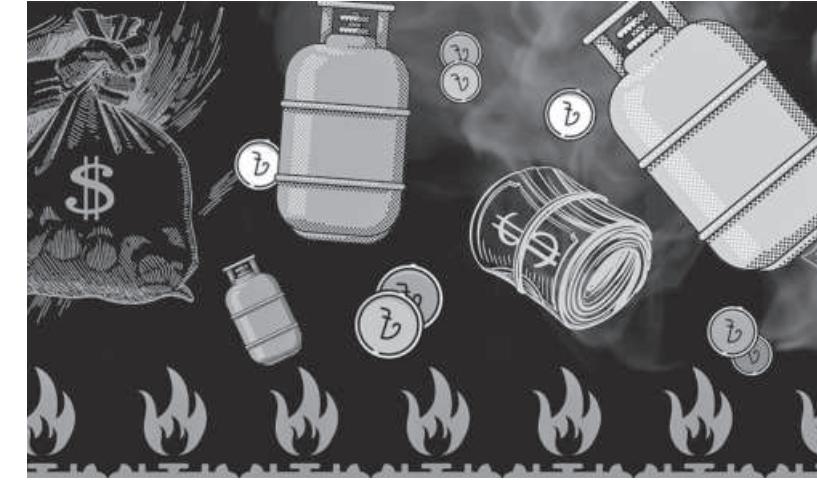
This increased operational cost will likely dampen domestic investment prospects. Smaller enterprises, already operating on thin margins, will face financial stress, which may lead to closures or downsizing of their businesses. This will cause job losses. Additionally, continuous hikes in utility costs might slow down economic growth.

From the perspective of attracting FDI, the gas price hike poses a significant challenge. Stable and predictable utility costs are crucial for attracting FDI. Frequent adjustments in energy prices due to fiscal pressures might portray Bangladesh as an unstable investment destination. This again can affect the competitiveness and attractiveness of the country to foreign investors. Since the cost of doing business significantly influences investment decisions, persistent uncertainty in energy pricing could potentially redirect investments to more stable economies.

The gas price hike aligns with the IMF's conditions for a \$4.7 billion loan, which emphasises reducing energy subsidies to improve Bangladesh's fiscal discipline. The country's substantial energy subsidies have placed considerable stress on its fiscal resources, contributing significantly to its budget deficit. The IMF's loan

conditions explicitly emphasise subsidy reductions to enhance fiscal discipline and ensure economic stability. Hence, the government's flexibility in maintaining the previous gas prices is limited. Continuing with the existing gas prices without adjustments could risk the financial support essential for macroeconomic stabilisation.

If Bangladesh opted not to increase gas prices, alternative mechanisms would be required to manage the burgeoning subsidy bill. These measures are short-term, medium-term, and long term in nature. One of the important options includes improving operational efficiencies in state-owned enterprises, minimising systemic wastage, and gradually phasing in targeted subsidies rather than implementing abrupt universal cuts. Additionally, adopting market-



FILE VISUAL: STAR

based pricing mechanisms, similar to those employed in many countries—both developed and developing—could help gradually rationalise subsidies without severely disrupting industrial production and the investment climate. Given that the overall inflation has been very high for about three years and non-food inflation is currently higher than food inflation, there should be targeted subsidies for the vulnerable population instead of blanket subsidies.

Though the IMF's stipulation against its loan to Bangladesh has acted as a catalyst for the gas price increase, the government needs to adopt various expenditure-reducing measures as part of broader structural reforms aimed at fiscal consolidation. Bangladesh's

foreign exchange reserve situation intensifies the need to be cautious in maintaining healthy reserves. As of March 2025, the country's forex reserves stood at \$25.51 billion, with net reserves at \$20.38 billion under the IMF's Balance of Payments Manual 6 (BPM6) methodology. With significant outstanding dues to international power and energy suppliers, payable in dollars, the government's decision was largely pragmatic. Maintaining subsidies without commensurate fiscal adjustments would further erode the forex reserves and weaken economic stability.

However, to bolster the forex reserves, Bangladesh should explore multiple avenues beyond immediate gas price hikes. Prioritising export diversification beyond RMG into sectors like electronics, pharmaceuticals, leather, agro-processing, and ICT can help generate stable, diversified export revenue. Remittance is another crucial component of the foreign currency inflows. This can also be enhanced by remittance facilitation and incentivisation, such as offering better banking channels and financial products for expatriates.

An important way to manage the gas crisis is the exploration and development of domestic gas fields,

private partnerships (PPPs), and attract international oil companies (IOCs) with attractive but fair terms. Successfully utilised PPP models and international collaborations can bolster domestic gas production and reduce import dependency.

In the short and medium terms, the government must adopt comprehensive policy measures beyond gas price adjustments. These measures include implementing energy efficiency initiatives, incentivising industries to adopt renewable energy solutions, and reducing systemic inefficiencies within the energy sector. For instance, upgrading outdated industrial equipment, improving insulation in factories, and promoting solar rooftop installations could significantly reduce the overall gas consumption.

Globally, there are examples where countries have successfully navigated similar challenges. For example, Vietnam effectively balanced energy subsidies with targeted investments in renewable energy. This has helped the country reduce its dependency on costly fuel imports. Indonesia has adopted a phased subsidy reduction complemented by substantial investments in renewable energy and domestic resource exploration, with the objective of stabilising its energy sector without drastically compromising industrial competitiveness.

For Bangladesh, the overall policy framework should emphasise enhancing energy accessibility, affordability, predictability, and sustainability through diversification and efficiency. The government should aggressively pursue renewable energy projects, particularly solar and wind, to reduce reliance on imported fossil fuels. Concurrently, adopting a transparent and predictable pricing mechanism can assure investors and industries alike and help stabilise the economic environment.

Substantial reforms in energy governance, including reducing corruption, improving transparency, and fostering competitive energy markets, are vital. For several years, significant inefficiencies and corruption within state-owned enterprises have contributed to inflating costs and diminishing effectiveness. Overcoming this requires urgent administrative reforms to foster investor confidence and economic efficiency.

While the recent gas price hike represents a short-term economic challenge, it also presents an opportunity for Bangladesh to recalibrate its energy policies towards sustainability and stability. By implementing strategic reforms in energy efficiency, exploration, and governance, coupled with diversifying foreign exchange income sources, the country can enhance energy security, attract investments, and ensure sustainable economic growth.

Five doable climate action reforms



Dr Haseeb Md. Irfanullah
is an independent consultant working on the environment, climate change, and the research system. He is a visiting research fellow at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB). He can be reached at hmirfanullah@outlook.com.

HASEEB MD. IRFANULLAH

Climate change, an undoubtedly neutral topic in Bangladesh's politics, doesn't have any space in the ongoing reform debates. Nevertheless, given its existential nature, it will be a missed opportunity if we don't take the following five doable actions soon to reform our climate action.

First, we have several good climate change-relevant plans in the country, including the National Adaptation Plan of Bangladesh (2023-2050) (NAP). However, we should prioritise only the NAP because it is very well-designed and the latest, and having too many investment plans is confusing. Besides, some Bangladeshi climate change experts think that adaptation should be our priority, not Loss and Damage (L&D). But, since adaptation measures have been failing to protect us from aggravated climate change impacts, taking L&D action is our next logical option. In the past 17 years (2007-2024), 17 big cyclones have hit Bangladesh. So, climate change-induced losses and damages are real for our country. The environment ministry, therefore, should adopt a national mechanism to figure out how the country should prepare itself, in terms of policy,

capacity building, knowledge, and finance, by responding to worsening losses and damages.

Second, we should redefine our climate action. Instead of small pilot projects, we should scale up our proven options. We must also ensure many co-benefits from one investment. When we grow resilient crops in vulnerable locations, for example, we shouldn't only think about how many people it will feed, but also if it will maintain the soil health, and ensure social equity. In another approach, we need to bring in multiple compatible solutions in one place to maximise the impact. When we manage floods, for instance, we shouldn't only rely on engineering (grey solutions) or focus only on planting trees on the upstream watershed (green solutions). We need to harness grey, green, even blue (water-based) solutions, as all kinds of solutions have strengths and can complement each other.

Third, during the last 10 fiscal years, climate-relevant budgets have been 7.26-10.09 percent of the 25 ministries' and divisions' total budget, and 0.7-0.8 percent of our national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In the next fiscal year (2025-26), we want the

climate-relevant budget to include the ministries of culture, information, religion, and youth too, as all are crucial for climate action. The budget summary should not be based on the obsolete themes of the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, 2009 (BCCSP). We need to bring in new themes. For example, adaptation money should be allocated under the "Locally Led Adaptation" theme, mitigation funds under "Green Growth" and "Just Transition", natural resource management activities under "Nature-based Solutions", and disaster risk management under the "L&D" theme. Knowledge and capacity building together must be cross-cutting themes, not separate ones. Further, the government should geographically (down to upazila level) allocate the climate budget based on vulnerability maps. Currently, we see serious anomalies in the geographical distribution of the Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund (BCCF) (e.g. Dhaka and Barishal divisions receive 38.26 percent of the total fund). We must correct this inconsistency.

The fourth proposed action is on Bangladesh Climate Change Trust's (BCC) governance. The seven sectoral ministries (e.g. local government, water, and agriculture) on the trustee board should be replaced, since these ministries are frequent recipients of the BCC. Instead, representatives of civil society, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and academia should be included. In the technical committee, the number of non-governmental technical experts should be increased.

The fifth proposed action is on the BCC's M&E system. The environment ministry's current focus on protecting rivers is commendable. But, we need it to be active in the climate change arena too—not only to present a healthy report in the next climate change Conference of the Parties (COP), but also for the sake of Bangladesh's resilience.

On December 31, 2024, the BCC uploaded the lists of a total of 944 projects: 254 ongoing, 623 completed, and 68 terminated. For transparency and accountability, the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) reports of the ongoing projects and project completion reports of the terminated and completed projects should be made public. The environment ministry-led trustee board should also restructure the BCC's M&E system by giving responsibility to regional NGOs and academia to reduce operating costs, increase efficiency, and encourage inclusive governance.

Finally, Bangladesh launched the "Bangladesh Climate and Development Partnership" to scale up cross-sectoral implementation of climate action. In addition to a coordination board, four working groups are part of its structure, covering climate finance, policy reforms, capacity building, and knowledge sharing. Since mid-December 2024, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has been supporting the environment ministry to operationalise this platform. The ministry should harness this opportunity and work with the finance division to allocate operationalisation budget for 2025-26.

The environment ministry's current focus on protecting rivers is commendable. But, we need it to be active in the climate change arena too—not only to present a healthy report in the next climate change Conference of the Parties (COP), but also for the sake of Bangladesh's resilience.



Paris Agreement signed

On this day in 2016, more than 170 countries signed the Paris Agreement on climate change, a landmark treaty that sought to control and reduce greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere. It took effect in November 2016.