

## Reduce system loss in energy sector

Govt must address technical defects, theft, and wastage

We are concerned about the financial losses the government is facing due to “system loss” in the gas sector. Petrobangla estimates that Tk 3,500 to 4,000 crore is lost annually from inefficiencies in the supply network, which is nearly half of the government subsidies given to the sector. More specifically, Petrobangla attributes the loss to distribution defects, illegal connections, and gas theft. Some experts, however, suspect that those in charge could be masking the high cost of purchased gas as “system loss” or theft. Whatever the cause, the fact remains that a vast amount of gas remains unaccounted for. At a time when the country is grappling with a severe gas crisis, causing disruptions in industrial operations and other sectors, a loss of this magnitude is unacceptable.

Reportedly, in the fiscal year 2023-24, an average of 6.28 percent of gas was lost in the distribution lines, amounting to 2,036 million cubic metres of gas, and resulting in a financial loss of Tk 3,790 crore. However, till March of FY2024-25, the loss increased to 7.44 percent, amounting to 1,451 million cubic metres of gas and causing a financial loss of Tk 3,286 crore. Officials estimate that the full fiscal year's loss would amount to nearly Tk 4,000 crore. At a time when the government is having to import LNG from abroad, providing a substantial amount in subsidies to address the country's gas shortage, such avoidable losses are deeply concerning. Reportedly, in FY2024-25, Petrobangla received Tk 8,900 crore as subsidy for the gas sector. That nearly half of that amount was lost due to gas theft and wastage is simply unthinkable.

Considering that international standards permit a maximum gas loss of only 0.20 to 0.30 percent in distribution lines, the overall system loss in our transmission and distribution network is alarmingly high. Experts also argue that the two percent loss recorded by the state-owned Gas Transmission Company Limited (GTCL)—responsible for delivering gas from production sources to distribution intake points—is unreasonable, as high-pressure transmission lines should not allow for significant wastage. While Petrobangla officials attribute this to technical faults, experts stress the need for thorough investigation to detect potential leaks or system errors.

System loss is a critical issue that must be addressed urgently. The authorities should minimise wastage by adopting advanced technology and closely monitoring transmission and distribution line faults. Replacing outdated pipelines and fixing leakages are also essential, alongside ensuring transparency and accountability in LNG purchase. Petrobangla must strengthen its oversight and actively work to curb illegal connections. Most importantly, accelerating domestic gas exploration is vital to reduce our overreliance on costly imported LNG.

## No more excuses for Dhaka waterlogging

We need good governance and real solutions

Waterlogging in Dhaka has become as predictable as the monsoon downpours, although they should not be mutually inevitable. According to a report, the Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) has identified 98 spots vulnerable to waterlogging, often leading to submerged homes and roads, hours lost in traffic gridlock, and severe disruption to daily life. This is despite the DNCC spending over Tk 650 crore on drainage development between 2020 and 2024. But lack of governance, poor planning, and disregard for environmental laws have made waterlogging a seemingly permanent curse.

The DNCC oversees 86km of canals, 300km of primary drains, and 1,200km of secondary drains. But areas like Kazipara, Shewrapara, Uttarkhan, Dakkhinkhan, and Mirpur are routinely flooded every year, indicating a system in complete collapse. The DNCC has acknowledged the problem and claims to have cleaned canals and conducted assessments. But this is too little, too late.

It is common knowledge that unplanned urbanisation over decades is responsible for the destruction of Dhaka's natural drainage system. In 1995, water bodies made up 20.57 percent of central Dhaka. Today, they account for only 2.9 percent. Green space has also declined—from 22 percent to nine percent over the same period. This indiscriminate encroachment has left a city paralysed by floods after even a moderate downpour. Most water bodies, drains, and canals are clogged with plastic and solid waste. Although DNCC has made efforts to clean canals, these have failed to deliver long-term results. Outdated and inadequate drainage systems have only worsened the crisis.

We urge the interim government to take bold action to address this crisis. The outdated 2015 drainage plan must be revised to reflect changing climate patterns, population growth, and rapid urban expansion. Encroachment of canals, water bodies, and flood flow zones must be stopped, and illegal structures preventing drainage must be removed. The government must also ensure that the two city corporations (North and South), WASA, and the Department of Environment work in a coordinated manner to address the waterlogging crisis.

Community-level programmes should also be initiated to involve citizens in maintaining cleaned canals. This includes forming local monitoring groups, incentivising proper waste disposal, and launching awareness campaigns. Moreover, there must be accountability and transparency in all public works. Citizens have the right to know how public funds allocated to address waterlogging have been spent, and to what effect. The authorities must also prioritise building a sustainable drainage system over superficial cleanups that offer little long-term relief.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY



### Unprecedented feat of US submarine

On this day in 1958, the US atomic submarine Nautilus passed beneath the thick ice cap of the North Pole, an unprecedented feat.

# What young people want a year on from July uprising



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Young people in today's Bangladesh are at a pivotal juncture. On the one hand, they are more educated, connected, and ambitious than any previous generation. On the other hand, they face a relatively tougher reality: shrinking economic opportunities, an outdated education system, and political structures that largely exclude them. Tensions over these challenges reached a boiling point during the 2024 July uprising, when young people took to the streets in a massive wave of protests and toppled the authoritarian regime of Awami League.

About a year after that upheaval, the South Asian Network on Economic Modelling (SANEM), in collaboration with ActionAid Bangladesh, launched the Youth Survey 2025. This nationally representative study, encompassing 2,000 young individuals aged 15 to 35 across all eight divisions, highlights the experiences and expectations of young people during this period of change. The results present a sobering yet hopeful picture: young people feel disillusioned, but they have not given up. They seek reform, not empty promises. Above all, they want to be heard.

### Education-employment disconnect

The survey reveals a significant gap between education and employability. Only 14.5 percent of the survey respondents believe their education has adequately prepared them for the job market. A startling 30.8 percent said their education had little to no effect on their readiness for employment. This underscores a fundamental failure of the current education and training systems to adjust to the evolving needs of the economy. While nearly half of the surveyed are still in school, more than 37 percent have dropped out, citing early marriage, financial struggles, etc.

Among those employed, three-quarters work in the service sector. However, these jobs are insufficient: 13.7 percent are actively seeking work without success, and an alarming 39 percent are “disengaged” entirely, meaning they are neither studying nor working, nor even searching for employment. These discouraged youths form a ticking time bomb for

both the economy and the social fabric.

### A generation locked out

Why are so many young people unable to access opportunities? One word dominates their responses: nepotism. Over 54 percent of the youth cite nepotism as the primary barrier to



About a year on from the July uprising, young people still feel disillusioned, but they have not given up.

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employment, followed by inadequate formal education and a mismatch between academic content and labour market demands. For many, job applications lead nowhere: 45 percent reported that they had not received a single interview invitation in the past year.

The gig economy offers some hope but also exposes gaps in awareness and access. While 70.8 percent of respondents see freelancing as appealing due to its flexibility and earning potential, only 10 percent are very familiar with it. Nearly half have no knowledge of the concept at all.

Meanwhile, migration remains a compelling option. Among the youth who have never worked abroad, nearly 40 percent say they are contemplating it. The reasons are clear: better pay, improved working conditions, and a more dignified life.

### Political vacuum

Despite their central role in the July movement, most young people remain politically disengaged. Only 23 percent follow national politics closely. A staggering 83 percent have no interest in pursuing a career in politics in the future. The gap between political parties and youth sentiment is stark: only 11.8 percent believe that current party agendas reflect the country's real issues.

This alienation has significant implications for Bangladesh's democratic future. While nearly 94 percent of the youth say they are hopeful the next election will be free and fair, their trust in political institutions remains fragile. Half

believe that political parties have failed to connect with them. The message is clear: symbolic inclusion is no longer enough. Young people demand real representation and accountability.

### Youth demands: From protest to policy

To respond effectively to this generational discontent, policymakers must listen. The survey shows that the youth overwhelmingly identify education reform (94 percent) as the top national priority, followed by health (92 percent), labour market reform (90 percent), and human rights (89 percent). Gender equality, institutional governance, and minority rights are also highly ranked.

However, awareness of the actual reforms following the July uprising remains low. Nearly half of the respondents did not even hear of the

proposed reform packages, and only 2.3 percent felt fully informed. There is a rising fear among 13.5 percent that reforms will never come to fruition. This cynicism is both dangerous and preventable.

To close the gap between rhetoric and reality, future reforms must be visible, inclusive, and results-oriented. This calls for transparency in implementation, participatory planning, and targeted outreach to marginalised groups. It also requires addressing the growing concern about religion-based politics, which nearly half of the youth consider unsuitable for Bangladesh's future—especially among non-Muslim respondents, who predominantly report feeling insecure.

### A hopeful yet fragile future

Despite the bleakness of many indicators, Bangladesh's youth have not lost hope. Most still intend to vote in the upcoming election. Many believe that meaningful reforms can improve the political and economic situation. And importantly, they remain willing to engage if given a reason to believe that their engagement will make a difference.

The July uprising must continue to serve as a wake-up call—not fade into a missed opportunity. Nearly a year on from that historic moment, we stand at a crossroads: if the voices of the youth remain ignored, their frustration may harden into fatalism; but if they are heard, valued, and acted upon, they could become the driving force behind a fairer, more prosperous, and inclusive future.

# When change agents lose their way



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Last year, the Students Against Discrimination (SAD) platform stood as the moral engine of a historic moment. It united a restless generation and, for a brief moment, people of all ages found hope in its banner as students shook the foundations of a draconian political order. The July-August uprising in 2024 promised more than a revolt. It promised a new kind of politics that placed conscience above opportunism. Unfortunately, that same banner now stands smeared by scandal. Over the past week, several SAD-affiliated leaders were arrested for allegedly demanding Tk 50 lakh from a former ALMP's family in Gulshan, and it was later discovered that they also pressured another former MP into signing cheques worth crores. These are not petty lapses. They go to the core of what gave SAD its moral legitimacy.

Since this development, SAD has expelled the accused and dissolved all of its committees across the country, except for the central committee. Former leaders, including Umama Fatema, have said that this is not an isolated incident but the product of a culture that tolerated closeness to power without accountability. This is not the first such allegation. It is, however, the first time the rot has broken through the surface for everyone to see.

Accountability must also extend

to the National Citizen Party (NCP). NCP emerged from SAD, yet when it transitioned into a political party, it left SAD intact, creating two overlapping structures that blurred the line between civic movement and party machinery. That choice was not prudent. It allowed SAD to drift on as an unregulated network while its most notable organisers moved into positions of influence inside NCP. Now that NCP holds significant political clout in the post-uprising political landscape, it cannot simply wash its hands of SAD's misdeeds. These incidents are not isolated; rather, they are the predictable outcome of a culture of informal power, favour-trading and access that NCP appears to have tolerated and, in practice, legitimised. To pretend the two are separate is to deny responsibility for the very decay that has now come back to stain them both. The trend of abusing power is not restricted to SAD, NCP, or affiliated organisations, however, with grassroots leaders of major political parties like BNP often engaging in similar crimes.

Max Weber, in his famous lecture “Politics as a Vocation,” argued that politics demands three virtues: passion, responsibility, and judgement. When passion is left without the discipline of responsibility, it curdles into vanity. Vanity feeds on the thrill of power, the privilege of access, and the self-

importance that influence brings. The Gulshan extortion case makes this lesson painfully clear. Passion that once drew a generation together has, when left unchecked, turned inward, away from purpose, and towards ambition. These young leaders did not simply break the law; they broke the covenant that sustains every serious political movement. This is not a matter of a few bad actors. It is the direct result of a movement that failed to cultivate a culture in which passion is anchored by responsibility.

Isaiah Berlin adds another warning. In *The Sense of Reality*, he wrote that political judgement is not about applying formulas but about reading the texture of a moment. The hardest test comes after the banners come down, when the fire of protest must be replaced by the discipline of building institutions. SAD's leadership has stumbled here. They behaved as if last year's tactics—with their reliance on informal authority, rapid mobilisation, and easy access through banners—could remain unchanged after the uprising. They failed to see that once the moment of revolt ends, legitimacy no longer flows from the street but from a disciplined organisation. When a movement cannot make this shift, its energy leaks into the hands of opportunists. The Gulshan scandal and earlier incidents—one where SAD activists assaulted a businessman in Mirpur, and another, where 14 SAD members were sent to jail for extortion and vandalism in Kalabagan—are the cost of that failure. Instead of recognising that their movement demanded institution-building, they continued to live off the moral credit of July as if it were inexhaustible.

Social movement scholars Francesca Polletta and Beth Gharrity Gardner

remind us that movements live and die by the stories told about them. Stories give meaning to sacrifice, bring diverse people together, and inspire allies. But when the story changes, trust collapses. The Gulshan incident is already replacing the story of a brave generation with another story. And once a movement loses control of its story, it loses its greatest resource. Numbers and access can be rebuilt, but moral credibility, once lost, is almost impossible to recover. If SAD's leaders treat these events as a passing lapse, they risk letting others write their final chapter. A public that once stood with them will see only another group seduced by the temptations of power.

Rebuilding trust will take more than expelling a few names, however. It requires a cultural reset. SAD needs an independent process to investigate wrongdoing, a clear and public code of ethics, and proper leadership training. Moreover, NCP must not be allowed to stand apart as if it has no role to play in this. NCP is not a bystander here. It has benefited from SAD's rise and must answer for the structures it created but never controlled. Without this reckoning, these organisations will be remembered not for the hope they once inspired, but for how quickly they fell into the same habits of the system that they had set out to challenge.

Bangladesh cannot afford to see another generation's idealism fade into cynicism. For SAD, as well as for NCP, this is a moment that will define their legacy. If they confront what has gone wrong, they may still reclaim the promises of July. If they turn away, they will lose the trust they inspired, and the banner that once stood for hope will be remembered only as a warning of what happens when a movement forgets why it was born.