

## Home adviser must retract his comment

His order to police to arrest without charge is deeply problematic

It is deeply alarming to see Home Adviser Jahangir Alam Chowdhury issue a verbal directive to police officers to arrest people even without a case, an instruction that strikes at the heart of the due legal process. By issuing such an order, Chowdhury has constituted a fundamental breach of the law that he is supposed to uphold. In a society governed by rules, the police are only enforcers of the law. There must be a credible, specific complaint and a legal basis for arresting a citizen. A warrant, or at the very least, clear legal grounds (or reasonable suspicion) must exist as a safeguard against abuse. Yet the home adviser seems to have instructed the police to tear up this rulebook.

Chowdhury reportedly told the Narayanganj superintendent of police, “Whether there is a case or not against an Awami League criminal is irrelevant. You must immediately bring them under law. Failure to do so will result in action against you.” The assertion that the existence of a case is “irrelevant” is stunning. In a democracy, a formal case is not a technicality; it is an essential prerequisite for any legal steps. By separating the power of arrest from the requirement of evidence, the home adviser is effectively inviting the police to act ultra vires—beyond their legal authority. Law enforcement agencies cannot be granted carte blanche to sweep up political opponents, or criminals, on presumption alone; this would erode the very legal system the interim government claims it is trying to restore.

The context for this directive is “Operation Devil Hunt Phase 2,” a security drive that has detained nearly 2,000 people in just 24 hours. While the government has a legitimate duty to disarm and arrest violent actors and maintain public safety, it cannot do so by ordering the police to break the law. When a home adviser threatens punishment for police officers who refuse to arrest uncharged individuals, he poisons the chain of command, forcing officers into an impossible choice between their oath to the law and obedience to superior command.

The fact that he now appears to be taking his legal cues from those demanding these arrests is deeply worrying, even if their grievances against the previous regime are valid. If an individual has committed a crime, the proper course is clear: the police must file a case and obtain a warrant. Anything less is an abuse of power. If the police can arrest someone today without a case or evidence—simply because a person in authority brands them an “AL criminal”—then the country is sliding back into the dangerous territory it sought to escape not long ago.

The interim government must not repeat the repressive tactics used by the former regime. Chowdhury’s order must be retracted immediately and publicly. Law and order cannot simply be restored by breaking the law.

## Efficient energy use is crucial

Recent gains show sustainable energy use strengthens economy

At a time when the country is grappling with high global fuel prices, dollar crisis, and persistent energy insecurity, a new report has revealed an encouraging finding. According to the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA), improved energy efficiency saved Bangladesh an estimated \$3.3 billion in the fiscal year 2023-24 by reducing fossil fuel consumption and avoiding energy imports equivalent to seven million tonnes of oil. This achievement clearly shows that efficient energy use is not only environmentally beneficial, but it could also be a vital economic strategy for the country.

The report attributes these savings to efficiency gains across households, industry, and the power system. Widespread use of LED lighting, along with energy-efficient fans and air conditioners, helped reduce electricity demand in homes. Meanwhile, industries upgraded boilers, furnaces, and captive power plants, and adopted waste-heat recovery technologies. Collectively, these measures enabled the economy to maintain the same level of output while consuming significantly less fuel.

These gains are also the result of long-term policy planning. The Energy Efficiency and Conservation Master Plan, adopted in 2016, set a target of reducing energy intensity by 20 percent by 2030. Between FY2014-15 and FY2023-24, energy efficiency reportedly improved by 13.64 percent, with momentum accelerating after FY2020-21, as global fuel volatility and domestic supply disruptions made efficiency a priority. IEEFA notes that Bangladesh is now on track to meet its national efficiency targets and updated climate commitments, potentially ahead of schedule. This is truly encouraging.

However, as the report rightly points out, vast opportunities remain untapped. Many captive power generators continue to operate inefficiently, and wider adoption of efficient motors, electric boilers, and modern machinery could further reduce fuel use and LNG imports. At the same time, stronger enforcement of appliance standards, building codes, and energy labelling is essential to secure real and lasting savings. Unfortunately, the recent increases in import duties on key components of LED lights and energy-efficient appliances could push price-sensitive consumers towards cheaper, inefficient alternatives. This is an issue the government must urgently review.

Energy efficiency has proven to be one of the most cost-effective ways to strengthen energy security, ease pressure on foreign exchange reserves, and build resilience against global fuel shocks. The government must, therefore, treat energy efficiency as a strategic national priority, ensuring close coordination among regulators, industries, and financial institutions to sustain and expand these gains. Equally important is accelerating the transition to clean energy. Without consistent policy support, enforcement, and incentives, Bangladesh risks sliding back into higher energy consumption and renewed dependence on costly fossil fuels.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

### South Korea gets first female president

On this day in 2012, Park Geun-Hye became the first female to be elected president of South Korea.

# Phulbari coal, power crisis, and a dangerous revisionism



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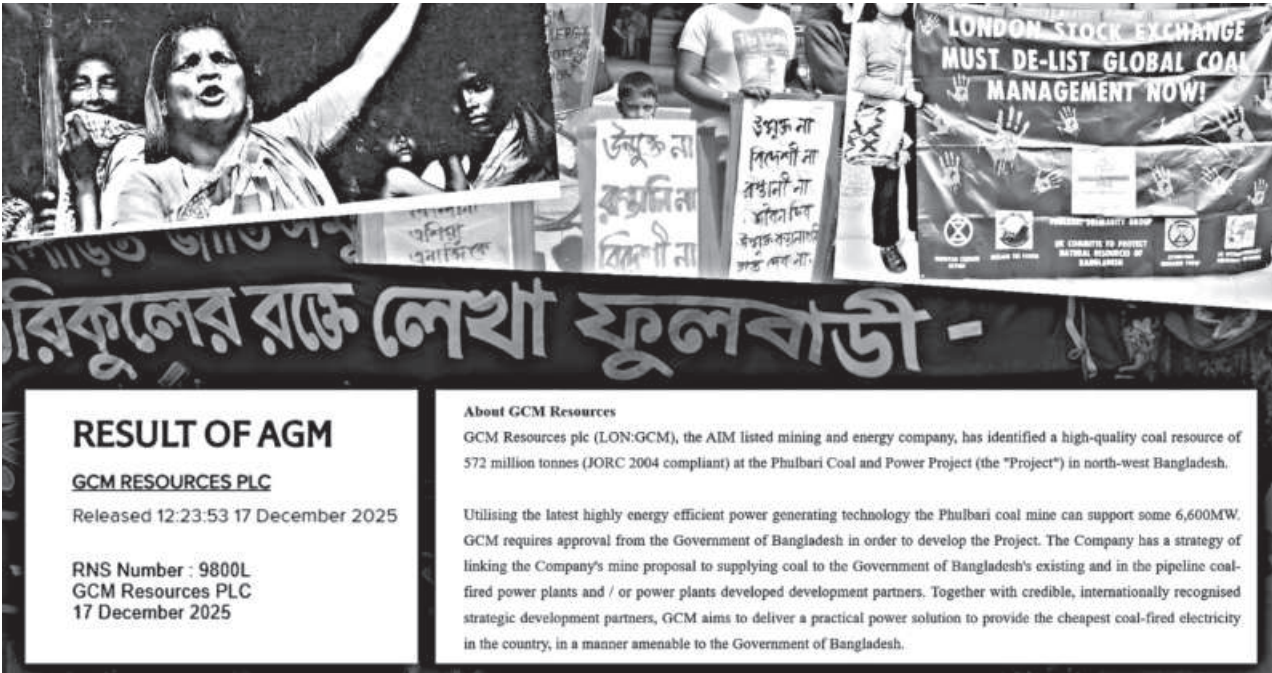
Regarding the Phulbari Open-Pit Coal Mining Project, the chief adviser’s press secretary recently made a Facebook post suggesting that Bangladesh is facing a severe power crisis because coal at Phulbari was not extracted. He went further, implying that those who resisted the project are responsible for today’s dependence on India and the resulting energy insecurity. When a press secretary speaks on a matter of such national importance, it is natural to expect the chief adviser to clarify his stance if the views expressed by his press secretary do not coincide with his. The reason for that is, the press secretary’s post is not only misleading but also factually incorrect, historically distorted, and deeply unjust to a movement that remains one of the proudest examples of public resistance in Bangladesh’s history.

The claim that Bangladesh would not have faced a power crisis had Phulbari coal been extracted is simply untrue. The proposed 30-year project by British company Asia Energy was based on open-pit mining, which would have required excavating vast areas of Dinajpur, destroying three-crop agricultural land across six upazilas in one of the country’s most important food-producing regions. To reach the coal, underground water aquifers would have been permanently drained. Hundreds of thousands of people would have been forced from their homes, turning them into environmental refugees, many with nowhere to go but already overstretched cities like Dhaka. The environmental damage would not have been contained within Phulbari and its adjacent region. Given Bangladesh’s dense network of rivers and wetlands, contamination would have spread far beyond the mining site, creating a cascading ecological disaster.

And in return for all this destruction, Bangladesh was offered only a six percent royalty. Eighty percent of the coal was earmarked for export. Even more absurdly, the plan included a railway line from Dinajpur to the project site to facilitate that export, with the cost to be borne by Bangladesh. In other words, the country would have lost land, water, food security, and livelihoods along with its coal resources, while paying to export its own coal abroad to ensure huge profit for the company. This was not development; it was an absurd project of a company to make super profit at the cost of unprecedented environmental destruction for the country, along with

its loss of agricultural land and human catastrophe.

That is why people resisted. On August 26, 2006, more than a hundred thousand people gathered in Phulbari to protest the project. The then Bangladesh Rifles opened fire on the crowd. Three people were killed. Many more were injured. What followed was a mass uprising and protest across the country, which forced the then-government to retreat from signing the project with Asia Energy. Instead, the government signed the Phulbari Agreement with local people and the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Port and Power as



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their representative just four days later, on August 30. Among local resistance movements in Bangladesh, Phulbari stands out not only for its scale but also for its global significance. It remains a rare example of a grassroots movement successfully stopping a powerful multinational project. To now blame that resistance for today’s power crisis is to patronise that destructive project and to erase people’s sacrifice, suffering, and democratic courage to uphold national interest.

Bangladesh’s current energy crisis and import dependence did not emerge because coal was left underground in Phulbari. It emerged because of deliberate wrong policy choices. Over the past decade, the state pushed ahead with coal-based power plants such as Rampal, Payra, Matarbari,

licence in Bangladesh. The company’s Phulbari project was effectively cancelled after the mass uprising of 2006. Since then, the licence has never been renewed. Yet, year after year, the company has continued to trade on the London stock exchange market by presenting Bangladesh’s coal resources as its asset (GCM Resources PLC filings), despite having no legal right to mine them. Successive governments have acknowledged this reality on multiple occasions, but no serious attempt has been made to stop the illegal use of Bangladesh’s natural resources in foreign financial markets.

It is imperative to investigate the network of beneficiaries of this illegal share market business. The reason is that, even without any licence, Asia Energy continues to enter into

expansion does the opposite. It worsens environmental risk, displaces communities, and locks a country into an unsustainable economic path.

The government’s responsibility now is clear. It must respect public resistance against a disastrous project, and not rewrite history to please corporate interests. It must fully uphold the Phulbari Agreement, stop Asia Energy’s illegal activities in foreign markets, withdraw the false and harassing cases against Phulbari organisers, and commit to energy choices that are environmentally sound, economically rational, and rooted in public interest. Phulbari is not just about coal. It is about whether truth still matters in policymaking, and whether people’s interest and their struggles still count in the future of this country.

# The gig economy’s convenience has an unseen toll



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Bangladesh’s gig economy, such as ride-sharing, food delivery, courier services, has mushroomed in the last decade. For the urban middle class, it has turned Dhaka’s traffic-clogged streets into a menu of instant conveniences: a car at your doorstep, biryani at midnight, medicine at the push of a button. For workers, it has opened new sources of income in a job market where formality is often a mirage. Yet, beneath this convenient opportunity lies a maze of human biases, where commuters and workers alike stumble in predictable, costly ways.

Take surge pricing. In theory, it is pure economics: higher fares balance demand and supply. But in practice, it preys on psychology. Few want to be stranded outside Bashundhara City Mall in a downpour or risk arriving late to an interview in Karwan Bazar. The “pain of paying” is dulled when urgency looms. People often treat an extra Tk 100 or Tk 200 as the price

of saving face, dignity, or dry clothes. This is loss aversion at work: the fear of inconvenience outweighs the pain of spending. Like an umbrella seller at New Market who doubles prices the moment the sky darkens, apps exploit the instinct that it is better to pay more now than regret later.

Workers face their own psychological traps. Gig platforms shower riders with pings, bonuses, and multipliers—a digital gamification of survival. A rider may slog through Mirpur’s gridlock for a Tk 50 bonus, not realising that fuel, time, and exhaustion quietly eat away at the reward. This is present bias: the lure of immediate cash eclipses long-term costs and riders often overestimate short-term wins while underestimating the toll on health, safety, and even family time.

The consequences ripple outwards. Consumers, hypnotised by convenience, often overspend; workers, nudged by psychological levers, often overwork for less-than-

expected earnings. What looks like freedom—the ability to choose when and how to work—can turn into an invisible treadmill. These dynamics are not unique to Bangladesh. Uber drivers in New York chase surge zones the way Dhaka riders chase Gulshan orders, and food couriers in Jakarta share the same complaints of exhaustion. However, in Bangladesh, where social safety nets are fragile, labour protections are thin, and digital literacy is uneven, the stakes are higher. In this context, cognitive biases are not just quirks; they can entrench inequality.

What, then, is the way forward? Behavioural economics offers not only diagnosis but also design. Imagine if ride-hailing apps showed a monthly spending tracker before you confirm your next ride: a gentle nudge reminding you that convenience costs add up like drips filling a jar. Or if delivery apps highlighted not just earnings but net earnings—what remains after fuel and time—helping riders see the hidden costs of “quick wins.” Even something as simple as mandatory rest reminders, like the breaks enforced in factories, could prevent accidents and burnout.

Policy, too, must step in. Regulation could require platforms to make surge pricing more transparent. Bonuses could be restructured to reward sustainable patterns rather than punishingly long shifts. Training

programmes, offered through unions or NGOs, could help gig workers recognise traps like present bias and overconfidence. Because the first step to beating a bias is knowing you have one.

Bangladesh’s digital platforms are becoming public infrastructure, as essential to urban life as buses or bazaars. And just as we regulate food safety or banking transparency, we must design digital labour markets with human psychology in mind. Otherwise, the shiny promise of convenience will mask a darker reality of exploitation.

The next time you accept a surge fare from Dhanmondi to Motijheel, or a rider races down Airport Road for a tiny bonus, remember these choices, in aggregate, shape the architecture of our economy: who prospers, who struggles, who gets left behind. Behavioural economics is the flashlight that reveals these invisible forces—and the map that can guide us towards a fairer, more humane gig economy. In a city where convenience often reigns supreme and patience is scarce, we must ask whether our choices will serve us, or whether we will remain passengers in a machine that profits from the quirks of our own minds. In the end, the cost of convenience is not just in taka; it is measured in the time, energy, and dignity that slip quietly through our fingers.