

Iran war threatens our energy lifeline

Govt must urgently plan to manage potential LNG shortages

As conflict fractures the Middle East following US and Israeli strikes on Iran and the subsequent closure of the Strait of Hormuz, economic repercussions are no longer confined to the Gulf. The shockwaves are already reaching South Asia, including Bangladesh. Faced with the prospect of a severe squeeze on fuel supplies, the government appears to be shifting from caution to urgency. Officials are reportedly preparing sector-wise rationing and potential power cuts to manage dwindling energy availability. The message to the public is simple: use energy sparingly, or be prepared to go without it.

To understand the scale of the threat to Bangladesh is to recognise the fragile, hyper-connected architecture of the modern energy market. According to a recent analysis by BRAC EPL Stock Brokerage, every \$10 increase in global oil prices raises Bangladesh's monthly import bill by roughly \$80 million. That vulnerability is particularly acute given that the country imports the overwhelming majority of its petroleum. Bangladesh spends about \$1 billion annually to bring in about 60 lakh tonnes of petroleum products, mostly through the Strait of Hormuz. Oil markets are already reacting. Brent crude, the benchmark for roughly two-thirds of the world's internationally traded oil, has climbed past \$82 a barrel. Analysts warn that a prolonged blockade of Hormuz could easily push prices beyond the \$100 mark. New price levels will sharply increase energy costs for Bangladesh, which purchased crude oil at an average price of about \$72 per barrel in 2025.

The more immediate vulnerability, however, lies in liquefied natural gas. Bangladesh meets nearly 30 percent of its gas demand through imported LNG, making it highly exposed to volatility in global spot markets. Petrobangla recently issued two tenders for LNG purchases—the new government's first attempt to procure cargoes from the spot market—but suppliers appear to be holding back, betting that prices will climb further.

The consequences could quickly spill over into the broader economy. Persistently higher energy costs would feed inflationary pressures just as policymakers hope to stabilise prices. If that happens, the central bank may be forced to reconsider its plans for monetary easing, slowing growth at a delicate moment when the economy is attempting to regain momentum.

The government should move swiftly to activate contingency plans that can temporarily offset LNG shortages. Ensuring adequate dollar liquidity for commercial banks will be equally important so that letters of credit for essential imports—particularly fuel—continue to flow. At the same time, tighter restrictions on luxury imports may be necessary to conserve foreign exchange reserves. The current crisis also exposes a deeper structural weakness. Bangladesh's long-delayed transition towards renewable energy has now become an economic imperative. For decades, policymakers have tethered the country's growth model to imported fossil fuels, assuming global supply chains would remain uninterrupted. The closure of Hormuz is a reminder that such assumptions can collapse overnight.

Fix the systemic loopholes

Laws without protection will not save women and children from abuse

Irrespective of how many strong laws we draft and enact to deter violence against women and children in Bangladesh, the heinous crime of rape continues to take place unabated. A recent compilation of data by Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) shows that over the last 13 months, since February 2025, there have been reports of 776 rape cases, and in nearly half of them, the victims were minors. Stricter punishments, clauses limiting the time for trial completion, and redefinition of consent and age limits—none seem to invoke fear in the minds of the perpetrators. Very little changes for the victims and survivors and their families. They continue to face barriers in reporting cases and accessing safe, gender-sensitive, compassionate and comprehensive police, medical and legal services and safe homes.

Worse still, fatwa or informal arbitration—although their enforcement has been banned by the Supreme Court in 2011—continues to be used to settle rape cases in rural areas. The consequences are often dire, as evident in the Madhabdi rape case. The 15-year-old victim did try to report when she was gang-raped, but the accused and his accomplices prevented her and her father from going to the police station, forcing them to approach the local government representative. This person, rather than ensuring that the complaint of this grievous crime was reported to the police, "settled" the matter through arbitration. As a result, the accused remained free and emboldened to commit an even more grievous act of murdering the girl.

Every sequence of this tragedy reflects the state's failure. The initial abduction of the victim when she was returning home from work highlights a fear shared daily by many women across Bangladesh. Then comes the issue of reporting; many people are still unaware of the existence of 24/7 hotlines, such as 109 or even 999, to report such crimes. Worse still, a public representative became complicit in the crime by attempting to "settle" a serious criminal offence through arbitration.

Therefore, what the government must prioritise is not another law or harsher provisions. Instead, it must address the systemic loopholes—from reporting to prosecution—so that conviction rates for rape and other crimes of violence don't remain low. Public awareness campaigns must inform people about available services, and investment in safe homes must increase. Most importantly, men and young boys must be taught—through avenues ranging from religious sermons to school textbooks—that women are not inferior beings and have equal rights to live free from fear and abuse in this society.

FATE OF 133 ORDINANCES

The 30-day test of the new parliament



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When the interim government assumed office following the upheaval of July-August 2024, it took on a nation still trembling from shock. Institutions were fragile, the bureaucracy uncertain, and public expectations overwhelming. Citizens demanded justice, reform, and visible change, and they demanded them quickly. In such moments, governments instinctively reach for speed. Constitutionally, speed comes in the form of ordinances.

Article 93 of the constitution allows the president to promulgate ordinances when parliament is not in session and when "circumstances exist which render immediate action necessary." The provision exists for instability and vacuum—it is a constitutional safety valve. But it is also limited. Ordinances cannot amend the constitution. They cannot override constitutional prohibitions, and they are inherently temporary.

Over the 18 months of the interim government, 133 ordinances were issued. The number is significant enough to prompt reflection: were there truly 133 instances of urgent necessity? Or did urgency gradually evolve into a governing habit? The interim authorities may argue, reasonably, that extraordinary circumstances required rapid intervention. Yet, constitutional systems are defined not only by how they respond to crises but also by how they restore normalcy afterwards. That restoration now begins.

On March 12, when the 13th parliament convenes, every ordinance must be laid before it. From that first sitting, a 30-day clock begins. Under Article 93(2), unless parliament approves an ordinance within that period, it automatically ceases to have effect. No dramatic vote is required. No formal repeal motion is necessary. This provision is not procedural trivia—it is a structural safeguard. Executive acceleration must eventually yield to legislative scrutiny.

Parliament now faces difficult choices. It may reject certain ordinances outright. It may selectively

convert some into bills and enact them after debate and committee review. Or it may allow some to lapse. None of these options are cost free. If ordinances expire, questions will arise about actions already taken under their authority: appointments made, bodies constituted, restrictions imposed, cases withdrawn. The disappearance of the legal basis does not automatically dissolve practical consequences. Courts may be asked to determine the continuing validity of steps taken under by-then-defunct instruments.



VISUAL: ALIZA RAHMAN

Each ordinance carries distinct legal implications.

Some of these measures are politically and constitutionally sensitive. The ordinance granting immunity related to the July uprising is perhaps the most emotionally charged. It provided for the withdrawal of cases against participants and barred new proceedings in certain circumstances. For many families, the uprising came to symbolise personal loss as more than a thousand lives were lost while several thousands of others were injured. The ordinance was seen by many as moral recognition of that sacrifice.

Yet, constitutional democracies operate on legal principles that must endure beyond emotion. Broad

criminal immunity, especially when granted through an ordinance, raises difficult questions about compatibility with constitutional guarantees and the rule of law. Even if parliament converts the ordinance into a statute, judicial scrutiny may follow. Courts assess legality through constitutional standards, not historical sympathy.

Another significant ordinance established a Constitution Reform Assembly pursuant to the July National Charter and a referendum in which a "Yes" vote prevailed. Referendums generate political momentum, but constitutional amendment procedures must be defined within the constitution itself, so parliament must determine whether the institutional pathway created through the ordinance aligns with those procedures. Given the ongoing controversy surrounding this assembly now—with the newly elected parliamentarians of the Jamaat-led alliance having taken oath as its

members, but BNP and allies choosing not to do so on account of it being "unconstitutional" at this moment—the need for clarity and structural coherence cannot be emphasised enough.

There are also socially sensitive ordinances. The one raising the age limit for entry into public service from 30 to 32 years was widely welcomed by young aspirants who felt disadvantaged by disrupted academic cycles. Allowing it to lapse may provoke frustration. Retaining it requires administrative recalibration. The parliament must weigh public expectation against institutional sustainability, recognising that popularity cannot be the sole measure of permanence. Similarly, the ordinance restricting political activities

of the ousted Awami League carries profound democratic implications. While the popular pressure that led to the ordinance needs to be acknowledged, the question now is whether its continuation would serve our democracy in the coming days, or if it's time to revisit it in light of ongoing ICT trials and post-election realities. Whatever the parliament decides, it will no doubt shape our future political trajectory.

The broader issue transcends individual ordinances, however. It concerns the hierarchy of governance. The interim administration governed without parliament and relied heavily on executive authority. That reliance was constitutionally permissible in the absence of a functioning legislature. But the restoration of parliament changes the constitutional balance. The logic of urgency must now give way to the logic of deliberation.

The practical challenge is formidable. Converting so many ordinances into statutes within 30 days requires more than procedural speed. The legislative process involves ministry review, cabinet approval, drafting, committee scrutiny, debate, passage, and presidential assent. Meaningful examination cannot be reduced to ritual. If parliament validates measures without scrutiny, critics may argue that executive exceptionalism has simply been retroactively endorsed. If it allows many to lapse without preparation, governance gaps and legal uncertainty may follow.

What is ultimately at stake is the constitutional culture. Emergency governance may justify exceptional measures, but exceptionalism cannot become routine. Bangladesh, from that respect, now stands at a crucial juncture. The transition of 2024 reshaped political alignments, the election last month restored parliamentary form, and the coming 30 days in parliament will determine whether legislative authority is meaningfully reasserted.

Thirty days may seem brief, but constitutionally they will be decisive. They will require lawmakers to separate urgency from necessity, popularity from legality, and political advantage from institutional stability, compelling a choice between governing by acceleration and governing by principle. The fate of 133 ordinances, therefore, will be watched closely. It will signal whether the country's constitutional order can move from emergency improvisation to accountable, deliberative governance.

Will artificial intelligence widen inequality?



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Artificial intelligence (AI) holds a lot of promise but also carries enormous risks. Aply titled "The Great Divergence," the UNDP Regional Human Development Report (RHDR) warns that, without decisive action, many developing countries in the region, owing to their weak capabilities, risk being left behind in the AI race. They will be unable to harness the upside of AI while mitigating the disruptions that have often accompanied frontier technologies. The risks are high as AI emerges amidst growing socioeconomic disparities among and within economies.

Like every major technological revolution—from steam power to electricity—should we expect a repeat of past trends from the emergence of AI, where inequality initially rises before benefits begin to diffuse? But we are entering the age of AI when inequality is already rising, exacerbated by the weakening relationship between GDP growth and job creation. For example, between 1995 and 2020, the top one percent captured 38 percent of global wealth, while the bottom 50 percent accounted for just two percent.

RHDR calls for embedding equity into policymaking. Equity cannot simply mean waiting for AI's accrued benefits and redistributing them. It begins with AI that serves people

and enhances human capabilities—a message that lies at the heart of human development. However, it cannot create equal opportunities for all if existing deficits in human, institutional, and financial capital are not recognised. Disparities in human development could be amplified by AI, a technology potentially as transformative as the steam engine and electricity. It is becoming a critical infrastructure that will determine the nature and pace of future development.

As the UNDP report shows, the Asia-Pacific will be a testing ground to see if AI led development converges development outcomes or drives countries further apart. Countries in this region lie across a broad development spectrum: very large economies, small island nations, landlocked countries, and high-income economies (greater than \$90,000 per capita GDP), alongside least developed countries (less than \$500 per capita GDP).

From labour-intensive manufacturing, Bangladesh aspires to move into high-value production of goods and services—towards a more diversified, globally competitive economy, a country with a social safety net that supports not only those temporarily affected by the vagaries of the market but also those who are

vulnerable and excluded. Moreover, a country with a public administration that is accountable and capable of delivering good quality services at scale. In all of this, AI could potentially play a critical role.

A forward-looking AI agenda for Bangladesh should focus on aligning it with the needs of people. Without a purpose-driven focus, there is a danger

A forward-looking AI agenda for Bangladesh should focus on aligning it with the needs of people. Without a purpose-driven focus, there is a danger that AI won't deliver its promise to improve human welfare. A good starting point for public policy is narrowing the digital gap. While connectivity has expanded in Bangladesh over the years, gaps still persist across rural areas, income groups, and gender.

will outweigh its disruptions in the labour market, but many agree that countries must rethink education and training systems. Previous waves—such as industrial automation in the 1970s, ICT diffusion in the 1990s, or the introduction of robotics in manufacturing—initially caused job losses but eventually contributed to productivity booms. We cannot necessarily take past evidence and extrapolate it to the future. However, a key lesson is that education and training systems should be adaptive to rapid technological change, embracing lifelong learning. It serves as an insurance policy against joblessness as the labour market adjusts to technological change.

Furthermore, AI in public services should be underpinned by transparency. AI-assisted services should be clearly explained, open to scrutiny, and corrected when errors or biases occur. For example, Canada provides a set of guidelines for the use of AI and automated decision-making. Public trust must not be undermined. Without safeguards, biased algorithms can erode trust and cause lasting harm.

Bangladesh is in a region that is likely to drive future global growth. According to recent estimates, the Asia-Pacific region will contribute 60 percent of the global GDP growth. Asia is also emerging as an important hub of AI investment and AI patents. A large country with a young population, Bangladesh has a stake in championing responsible AI for prosperity, while strongly advocating for minimum standards and collective safeguards essential for human-centric AI development. Bangladesh has already conducted an AI Readiness Assessment that provides a solid foundation for developing an AI roadmap for the future.

There may not be consensus on whether the net benefits of AI

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Tikka Khan appointed East Pakistan governor

On this day in 1971, the appointment of Tikka Khan as the governor of East Pakistan was officially announced.