

## ICDs, lighter vessels face diesel crisis

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Container handling at private inland container depots (ICDs) and transport of import cargo on inland waterways risk disruption due to a shortage of diesel from state-owned oil depots, say operators.

Over the past few days, Padma, Meghna, and Jamuna depots have not been supplying fuel in line with demand, they alleged.

The Bangladesh Inland Container Depots Association (BICDA) and Bangladesh Water Transport Coordination Cell (BWTCC) yesterday sent separate letters to authorities seeking uninterrupted supply to keep export and import activities running smoothly.

The 21 ICDs in Chattogram handle nearly all export containers and a quarter of imports, moving over 2,000 TEUs (Twenty-foot Equivalent Unit) of export cargo to the port daily and processing more than 1,000 TEUs of imports.

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File photo of lighter vessels anchored near Chattogram port in the Bay of Bengal waiting their turn to unload goods from mother vessels at the outer anchorage.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAHMAN

## Laws alone can't ensure gender equality

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Enrico Lorenzon, team leader of Inclusive Governance at the European Union Delegation to Bangladesh, said formal constitutional guarantees are insufficient unless they are enforceable.

"A right recognised in law must also be real in practice. It must be accessible, enforceable, and enjoyed equally by all."

Presenting her study, which assessed 32 laws, Dr Taslima Yasmin, associate professor at the law department of Dhaka University, argued that Bangladesh's legal framework remains hindered by "colonial-era language".

She highlighted a glaring loophole in the Penal Code that essentially allows the rape of child brides.

"A child is allowed to be raped literally by the Penal Code definition because of the exemption for child brides... We must repeal such colonial-era provisions."

Yasmin also advocated for a Uniform Civil Code, mandatory marriage registration for the Hindu community, and a comprehensive anti-discrimination law to move beyond fragmented reforms.

The event also featured a panel discussion, moderated by Shrabana Datta, project manager at UN Women, which examined how laws often falter in practice.

Supreme Court lawyer Muhammad Amirul Haq Tuhin described the pursuit of justice under the Domestic

Violence Act as "a matter of luck", noting that while some judges are familiar with the law, others dismiss it entirely.

"One judge even mockingly asked, 'Is this a law or a PhD thesis paper?'"

He flagged a loophole where husbands claim "verbal divorces" to disqualify women from protection and criticised the lopsided punishment structure where women face higher penalties for filing "unnecessary" cases than men do for violating protection orders.

Labour Court Bar Association Vice President Sharmin Sultana Moushumi highlighted the legal vacuum in the informal sector and exposed the "compliance theatre" in factories where childcare rooms exist only to satisfy international buyers.

"In most factories, childcare rooms exist only to show buyers; in reality, the mothers cannot keep their children there."

Moushumi also noted that without written appointment letters, domestic workers cannot prove their employment in court.

Sara Hossain, honorary executive director of BLAST, offered a pragmatic counterargument to the total repeal of the Guardians and Wards Act (1890), warning that repealing laws without a solid replacement is "dangerous".

She also addressed the current landscape of female participation in the legal system.

"We see only 10 percent

representation of women in the Supreme Court. While it has reached 33 percent in the subordinate judiciary, we should aim for at least 50 percent -- but representation without a progressive mindset is not enough."

Hossain also noted that the court system is just the tip of the iceberg, as most disputes are resolved outside formal courts.

"We must formally empower community organisations and ADR [Alternative Dispute Resolution] processes to deliver justice more sensitively and effectively."

The roundtable also underscored how marginalised groups face compounded barriers.

Salma Mahbub, general secretary of B-SCAN, a women-led organisation for persons with disabilities, criticised the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act for failing to explicitly mention women and girls.

"This invisibility ignores their unique vulnerabilities to abuse."

Masuda Rehana Begum, joint general secretary of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, called for a gender-neutral Uniform Family Code.

"To stay with the world in the 21st century, we must think of ourselves first as human beings," she stated, arguing that under their proposed uniform family code, a capable wife would even provide maintenance for an unable husband.

Fawzia Khondkar, executive director of Pragrosor, challenged

the labour law mandate for daycare only in workplaces with 40+ female workers.

"Daycares should be gender-neutral to encourage men to share the burden of care work."

Ummy Sharaban Tahura, a district judge and deputy secretary of the Law and Justice Division, shared that legal aid is now free for all persons with disabilities, regardless of income.

She noted a 312 percent mediation success rate in 10 pilot districts, indicating high public trust when judges act as mediators.

However, she admitted to a "conviction gap" in criminal cases.

"This isn't just a legal failure; it's a social phenomenon where evidence goes missing or parties lose interest and settle privately before the case reaches its end."

ATM Morshed, lead at legal aid and policy advocacy at BRAC; Prof Dr Tania Haque of the women and gender studies department at Dhaka University; Laila Jasmin Banu, EU representative to Bangladesh; Asma Ruba, project coordinator at Ain o Salish Kendra; Ruhi Naz, deputy director of Research Initiatives Bangladesh; and Humaira Aziz, gender programme specialist at UNICEF Bangladesh, among others, spoke at the event.

The discussion was moderated by Tanjim Ferdous, head of strategic partnership at The Daily Star.

## Forex reserves in focus

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avoid raising domestic fuel prices, as the BPC has the financial capacity to absorb higher costs in the short term.

The state-run corporation logged a profit of Tk 4,700 crore in fiscal year 2024-25, according to Moazzem.

"It is also selling petroleum at higher prices and has the capacity to absorb the extra cost in the short term," he said, adding that tensions surrounding the Strait of Hormuz, a critical route for global oil shipments, may gradually ease if the situation stabilises.

According to the BPC officials, though they have a plan and deals with the refineries until June, the prices are determined by the international free on board (FOB) rates.

When a shipment arrives at port, the price is fixed then -- by calculating the rates of that day, the previous day and the following day.

The surge in global oil prices poses a significant challenge for Bangladesh's macroeconomic management, said Ashikur Rahman, principal economist at the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh.

As a net energy importer, higher oil prices will immediately put pressure on the balance of payments by increasing the country's import bill, he said.

Policymakers will therefore need to carefully calibrate their response to ensure a stable supply of fuel while protecting the country's foreign exchange reserves.

Under such circumstances, an upward adjustment in domestic petrol prices may become necessary to absorb part of the external shock.

"At the same time, higher energy costs can quickly transmit into broader inflation through increased transportation and production costs. This makes inflation management more complex at a time when price stability remains a key concern."

The Bangladesh Bank should maintain its current contractionary monetary policy stance to prevent the oil price shock from triggering prolonged inflationary pressure.

Ashikur pointed to the global oil shocks of the 1970s and the price surge in 2022 as lessons for policymakers.

During both periods, countries that pursued loose monetary policies experienced prolonged inflationary spirals, while those that maintained tighter monetary conditions generally saw only temporary spikes.

"Bangladesh, therefore, needs steady and disciplined macroeconomic management to

navigate these external turbulences and protect overall economic stability," he added.

Meanwhile, the rising global oil prices could also affect electricity generation, particularly at oil based power plants that play a crucial role in Bangladesh's power supply.

Fuel stocks at oil-fired power plants are sufficient to sustain electricity generation until April 10 at most, according to the Bangladesh Independent Power Producers Association (BIPPA).

The warning came at a press conference in Dhaka, where BIPPA President David Hasanat and former president Imran Karim presented data on the current state of fuel supply and power plant operations.

The private-sector power plants had around 1,30,000 tonnes of furnace oil in stock about a week ago, Karim said.

Of that amount, nearly 55,000 tonnes are held by just two or three companies, while the rest is spread across various operators.

Because oil-based power plants are located in different parts of the country, fuel stocks are unevenly distributed, he said. As a result, some plants may have enough fuel to operate until mid-April, while others could face shortages sooner.

On average, the current stock can sustain oil-based power generation until April 7 to 10, Karim said.

Private-sector plants currently account for around 45-49 percent of Bangladesh's electricity generation, making their continued operation critical for maintaining power supply.

Karim also expressed concern over delays in payments to private power producers.

Though there is no scope to delay the bills by more than 30 days, in many cases, bills are paid six to nine months late, creating significant pressure on operators to cover fuel import and operating costs.

Outstanding dues have already exceeded Tk 14,000 crore, he said, adding that although producers have the contractual right to suspend operations due to unpaid bills, domestic power producers have so far refrained from doing so.

"The country's power sector is currently at a critical juncture," said BIPPA President David Hasanat.

Without short-term and long-term planning, the electricity supply could face serious risks.

Maintaining investment in the sector will require stronger coordination between the government and private investors, along with clear policy direction for the future, he added.

## Over 37,000 women to get

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income groups to upward and eventually implemented nationwide.

The minister also said the programme would be carried out transparently. Everyone would get its benefit, regardless of which political party they support.

In response to a question from journalists, Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir, PM's adviser on finance and planning, said the government would not face any problem in funding the programmes.

The current social safety net programmes have many errors and flaws. By correcting these, waste will be reduced, and the tax-to-GDP ratio will increase. As a result, financing will not be an issue, he added.

Social Welfare Minister Zahid added that women-headed families receiving the Family Card will not be eligible for any other government benefits or allowances, and any existing benefits will be cancelled.

However, the benefits of the other members of those families will remain unaffected.

Responding to a question about any poor families who are not headed by women, he said they would consider this in the next fiscal year when this programme will be implemented in full swing.

Around Tk 38 crore has been allocated to implement the pilot programme of the Family Card scheme up to June. Of the amount, Tk 25.15 crore will be required for the allowance, while the remaining fund will be used for the beneficiary selection process, he added.

The 14 selected areas for the pilot phase are Banani (Korail, Sattala, and Bhashantek slums) and Mirpur/Shah Ali (Oli Mirar Tek and Baganbari slums) in Dhaka; Pangsha in Rajbari; Patenga in Chattogram; Bancharampur in Brahmanbaria; Lama in Bandarban; Khalishpur in Khulna; Charfesson in Bhola; Derai in Sunamganj; Bhairab in Kishoreganj; Bogura Sadar upazila; Lalpur in Natore; Thakurgaon Sadar upazila; and Nawabganj in Dinajpur.

The government's ultimate objective is to gradually bring two crore families under monthly cash support under the Family Card programme.

The Family Card Piloting Implementation Guideline, 2026,

prepared by the social welfare ministry, envisions transforming the Family Card into a "Universal Social ID Card" for every citizen by 2030 and increasing the social security budget to 3 percent of GDP by 2028.

At present, 95 social safety net programmes are run by 23 ministries. The allocation for the programmes is Tk 1.26 lakh crore this fiscal year, which is 1.87 percent of GDP.

Under the new scheme, cards will be issued in the name of the female head of household. Beneficiaries will be selected using Proxy Means Test (PMT) scoring, a scientific poverty assessment method.

## Joint forces

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immediately be confirmed due to poor mobile network coverage in many parts of the area.

He said authorities also plan to set up two security camps, one each for police and Rab, to maintain security in the vast area.

Jungle Salimpur, a remote hilly area, came under renewed scrutiny after a Rab officer was beaten to death by a group of criminals during an operation in January.

However, police could not detain Md Yasin, leader of the "Yasin Bahini," who is considered a key figure in the Jungle Salimpur-Ali Nagar area, as he fled during the drive, the DIG said.

"Our operation is ongoing. A total of 3,200 members from Rab, police, army, BGB and APBn are participating. We have been working here since dawn.

"Our main focus was to establish our authority in this vast area, and we have been able to do that," the police official said yesterday.

Divisional Commissioner Dr Ziauddin said the operation had restored administrative control in the locality.

"The government had earlier taken development plans surrounding this area, and now we will begin implementing them," he told journalists.

Asked how security would be ensured for the camps in the hilly terrain, DIG Ahsan told The Daily Star, "If necessary, we will even deploy cannons here to ensure the security of the camps."

Chattogram District Police Superintendent Nazir Ahmed said multiple teams were involved in the drive.

## Global arms exports soar on European demand

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"Deliveries to Ukraine since 2022 are the most obvious factor, but most other European states have also started importing significantly more arms to shore up their military capabilities against a perceived growing threat from Russia," he said in a statement.

European countries accounted for 33 percent of global arms imports, increasing their imports by 210 percent from the previous five-year period.

Almost half of weapons to Europe, 48 percent, came from the United States.

The US dominated weapons exports, accounting for 42 percent of all international arms transfers in the period -- up from 36 percent in the previous five years.

Despite talk of Europe needing

to become more self-sufficient, George noted that transfers between European countries accounted for only a fifth of flows in the region.

"European suppliers are still supplying majorly outside of Europe rather than within," George said.

Germany did overtake China to become the fourth largest arms exporter in 2021-2025, with 5.7 percent of global arms exports.

Almost a quarter of German exports went to Ukraine as aid and only 17 percent went to other European states, meaning more than half left the continent.

US dominance in supplying Europe was likely to continue for the foreseeable future, George said, pointing out that more than 460 F-35 fighter jets were pending

delivery.

Arms imports to the Middle East shrank by 13 percent between 2016-2020 and 2021-2025.

But three of the world's top importers still came from the region, which received more than half of its imports -- 54 percent -- from the United States.

Saudia Arabia accounted for 6.8 percent of global imports, while Qatar and Kuwait accounted for 6.4 percent and 4.8 percent respectively.

"Moving forward, we do see a whole list of things that are pending for delivery to the Middle East.

"So when they are delivered, then we can see those numbers potentially go up," George told AFP.

When it comes to exports, the United States is in a class of its own, George noted.

## 'People's voting rights were violated'

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The Jamaat chief said the number of seats his party holds in parliament is not the main issue. "How many seats we have in parliament or whether we have been made the opposition in a calculated way is not our primary concern. What matters is that we will not betray the people of Bangladesh."

He added that Jamaat would not be swayed by "cheap privileges" and would remain committed to ensuring

people's rights.

Recalling the mass uprising of 2024, Shafiqur said the change brought about under the leadership of the youth must be honoured.

"After enduring 54 years of suffering, the youth led the change. Jamaat will hold them close to its heart and work to fulfil their aspirations," he said, adding that young people want justice and reject nepotism.

The Jamaat ameer said those in the ruling party are not his party's enemies and politics should serve the people rather than any particular party or group.

He also warned that unless "the poison of vengeance" and "the cancer of corruption" are removed from politics, the country may face even worse crises in the future.

The opposition leader said Jamaat would raise people's demands

before parliament and support any government initiative that ensures citizens' rights.

"If people's rights are violated again, we will protest strongly. If protests work, Alhamdulillah; if not, we will build resistance."

The programme was chaired by Jagpa Spokesperson Rashed Prodhana. Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) President Col (ret'd) Oli Ahmad also spoke.

## Chhatra Shakti men beat up

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saying he is a regular student who attends classes in the philosophy department.

However, Md Saifullah, social welfare secretary of the Haji Muhammad Mohsin Hall student body and organisational secretary of Jatiya Chhatra Shakti's Dhaka University unit, alleged that Pavel had been involved in attacks during the July movement and had been boycotted by both his department and hall.

He said students recently learned that Pavel had put up Chhatra League posters on campus and had been organising iftar

gatherings with former activists of the now-banned organisation.

"When we caught him and wanted to check his phone, he reacted aggressively. Students then handed him over to the police."

Contacted by The Daily Star, Dhaka University Proctor Saifuddin Ahmed said he spoke to police after learning about the incident, adding that Pavel was sent to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital for treatment.

He added that no complaint had been submitted from the victim's side. "To take any action over the incident, a complaint has to be filed."

About Pavel's alleged links to

BCL, he said he is not among the 403 leaders and activists of Chhatra League show-caused by the university for their alleged involvement in attacks during the July uprising.

Later at night, both parties filed complaints with Shabbagh Police Station.

The station's Sub Inspector Mainul Islam said, "Pavel's mother filed a complaint around 11:30pm. About half an hour later, the other party filed a complaint against Pavel, alleging his involvement in 'Proloy Gang' and the Chhatra League."

The "Proloy Gang" has long been known for criminal activities on the

DU campus.

According to Pavel's mother, Parveen Akter, the accused -- Saifullah, Hasib-Al-Islam, Saeed Afridi, Riyad Mal, Sardar Nadeem Shuvo, Md Sakib, Forkan Uddin Mahi, Bayezid Hasan, Himel, and Sanjib Hossain -- along with 10-15 unidentified individuals, attacked Pavel in a group using locally made weapons, iron rods, steel pipes, and sticks.

Speaking to this correspondent, Md Sakib, one of the accused and a leader of Chhatra Shakti, said, "This is a conspiracy against us. We will fight this legally."