



SAVING POWER, ENERGY Austerity steps in the works

BAHARAM KHAN and ASIFUR RAHMAN

The government is weighing a set of austerity measures, including extending weekends and introducing work from home options, as mounting global uncertainties put pressure on the energy sector.

Adjusting office hours and taking classes partially online are also being considered.

Officials from the Cabinet Division and the Prime Minister's Office said all agencies have been asked to prepare proposals on saving energy, which would be placed at the next cabinet meeting.

They said a three-month short-term plan is being drafted, with mid- and long-term strategies under consideration if the US-Israel war on Iran grinds on.

The move comes amid tight fuel supplies, kilometre-long queues at filling stations, and rising import costs.

Officials said at least eight measures were under discussion.

These include adding an extra day to the weekend or allowing officials to work from home for two days a week.

Office hours may be adjusted, either by starting earlier or reducing working time.

To cut fuel and power use in educational institutions, half of the weekly classes may be held online.

Officials said no final decision has been made, and the cabinet would determine which steps to adopt.

Beyond energy savings, the government is also seeking to ease pressure on foreign currency reserves as energy import bills are expected to rise further in the coming days.

Proposals to save foreign currency include restricting overseas trips by officials and avoiding unnecessary government borrowing.

A proposal to raise fuel prices may also be placed at the meeting, although officials said it remains uncertain, as the government has repeatedly said it does not want to hike prices at this stage.

"If the global situation worsens, we may need to move beyond short-term steps," a senior official said, pointing to possible six-month and one-year plans.

Several ministries have already begun drafting their own austerity measures, sources said.

The government has already taken steps in recent days to curb fuel hoarding.

Officials say demand-side control may now be necessary to ease the pressure.

Demand-side control, or Demand-Side Management (DSM), refers to utility-driven strategies aimed at influencing, reducing, or shifting electricity consumption patterns, particularly during peak demand periods.

None of the officials contacted for this story agreed to speak on the record.

A senior public administration ministry official, requesting anonymity, argued that faster action is needed.

"We have experience from the Covid period. Decisions could have been taken earlier. If required, a special cabinet meeting can be called," the official said.

Another official said that many in the current cabinet are new in governing, which may slow down the decision-making process during a crisis. The official suggested involving those who handled past crises.

The Daily Star yesterday tried several times to contact Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Iqbal Hassan Mahmood Tuku and State Minister Anindya Islam Amit, but none of them picked up the calls. Energy Secretary Mohammad Saiful Islam's phone was found switched off.

Meanwhile, the public administration ministry yesterday asked offices to strictly follow energy-saving instructions issued earlier this month.

These include using natural light during the day, keeping air conditioner temperature at 25 degrees Celsius or higher, and turning off electrical equipment when not in use.

Offices have also been asked to avoid unnecessary lighting and ensure efficient use of energy.

Each office will form a vigilance team to monitor whether the instructions are being followed.

The ongoing conflict in the Middle East is exerting growing pressure on global energy markets, with Bangladesh among the countries feeling the strain as disruptions in fuel and liquefied natural gas (LNG) supplies begin to affect electricity generation.

At the centre of concern is the Strait of Hormuz, a vital route for oil and LNG shipments. Any disruption there directly impacts import-dependent nations like Bangladesh, where power plants rely heavily on overseas gas and fuel supplies.

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Army personnel were called in after people from local auto repair shops started protesting at a filling station over long queues of vehicles, particularly motorcycles, in front of their shops on Kalsi road in the city's Mirpur yesterday afternoon. The protesters left shortly afterwards. The queues stretched for nearly a kilometre amid a fuel supply crunch linked to the US-Israel war on Iran. The other side of the "closed" sign displays "open". PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

At least 38 children dead in measles outbreak

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

At least 38 children have died of measles and related complications this year as the infectious disease is spreading in the capital and several other districts.

Of the deaths, 32 occurred this month -- 21 of them at the Infectious Disease Hospital (IDH) in the capital's Mohakhali, including three yesterday, as the facility struggles with a surge of patients arriving from across the country.

Six children died at Bangladesh Shishu Hospital and Institute, five died at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH), four victims were from Chapainawabganj, and one died at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital (RMCH), officials said.

Several media outlets, including Prothom Alo, reported that 12 measles patients died at RMCH.

Meanwhile, two patients from Pabna died in Dhaka last month, including one at Shishu Hospital and one at Padma General Hospital, said the Civil Surgeon Office, Pabna.

If the numbers are included, the total number of deaths this year would rise to 46. The number could be even higher as the health authorities do not have comprehensive data on measles-related deaths.

Doctors and health officials said the number of measles patients started to rise from December last year but increased sharply this month. Apart from Dhaka, a growing number of cases have been reported in Mymensingh, Chapainawabganj, Pabna, Natore and Rajshahi.

As most of the admitted measles patients were found to be unvaccinated, experts and health officials blamed gaps in immunisation, particularly

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- » Around 80% deaths related to measles this year occurred in March
- » Toll likely higher as there is no comprehensive documentation
- » Babies under 6 months old admitted with symptoms is unusual
- » Outbreak due to disruption in vaccination drive
- » Political situation, health workers' strikes, funding shortage disrupted vaccination drive
- » Vaccination campaign expected to start soon

CONSTITUTION REFORM COUNCIL JS discussion set for tomorrow House witnesses heated exchange between treasury and opposition

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A two-hour discussion on convening the Constitution Reform Council will be held in parliament tomorrow.

Deputy Speaker Kayser Kamal, who was presiding over the House yesterday, made the announcement after heated exchanges between members of the treasury and opposition benches.

The debate began after opposition leader and Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman submitted a notice seeking a discussion on convening the Constitution Reform Council.

Officials at the Parliament Secretariat said it has been rare for the speaker to allow discussion on such a notice since the restoration of parliamentary democracy in 1991.

After the question-and-answer session, Shafiqur took part in the unscheduled discussion and said he had raised an issue of public importance. He noted that the speaker had advised him on March 15 to submit the notice in proper form.

"We have done so. Now, through you, I am placing this notice before parliament. The subject of the notice is the July National Charter Constitution Reform Implementation Order 2025," said the Jamaat-e-Islami ameer.

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ICT prosecutor links ex-army officers with grave crimes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The chief prosecutor of the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) Aminul Islam yesterday said two recently arrested retired senior military officers were involved in activities that fall within the definition of crimes against humanity, including secret detention, killings, and enforced disappearances.

He described former Director General of the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) Lt Gen (ret'd) Sheikh Mamun Khaled and another former army officer Lt Gen (ret'd) Masud Uddin Chowdhury as "accomplices of the fascist Awami League regime" and "perpetrators involved in serious crimes".

Here referred to alleged links to clandestine detention facilities, including the so-called "Aynagar", where detainees were reportedly held and tortured.

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People hold signs and flags as they march during the 'No Kings' national day of protest in Chicago, Illinois, US on Saturday. Nationwide demonstrations against US President Donald Trump drew millions, with protesters denouncing what they see as his authoritarian tendencies and law-trampling governance. Story on page 12. PHOTO: AFP

US is plotting ground attack

Says Iran as US Marines begin to arrive in ME; Houthis again target Israel amid raging war

AGENCIES

Iran said it was ready to respond to any US ground attack, accusing Washington of preparing a land assault while seeking talks, as regional powers met in Pakistan yesterday to try to bring the two sides together.

The war, launched on February 28 with US and Israeli strikes on Iran, has spread across the Middle East. Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthis joined the fray Saturday by launching missiles at Israel, promising one more front in the complex war.

The strikes point to a potential new threat to global shipping, already hit by the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz, previously a conduit for about a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas supplies.

"The enemy publicly sends messages of negotiation and dialogue while secretly planning a ground attack," Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf said in a statement carried by the official IRNA news agency.

"Our men are waiting for the arrival of the American soldiers on the ground to set them on fire and punish their regional allies once and for all," he added.

"As long as the Americans seek Iran's surrender, our response is that we will never accept humiliation," he said in a message to the nation.

The Trump administration has deployed US Marines to the Middle East as the war in Iran stretches into its fifth week.

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