



# YOU WANT AN EMPTY DHAKA, but can it survive without people?

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"Go back to where you came from, leave us alone," I bet that line made you angry. It's one of those lines you hear from certain elitists across the world, and, ironically, even in Dhaka.

During Eid or other long holidays, most people leave the metropolitan city to return to their hometowns or villages to spend the occasion with their loved ones. The numbers are staggering, and as a result, this leaves Dhaka practically empty.

This is where the elitists chime in, riding their high horse and sneering at people who return home. They say provocative things that get under your skin, such as: "why can't we have Dhaka like this all the time?" and "Dhaka is so much better without the invaders." Then it escalates – from bad to worse, one sentence at a time.

They go on to say offensive things like: "Go back to your village, leave Dhaka alone. Dhaka is dying because of you."

I've heard different versions of these comments here and there, and they are heard more often during long holidays. It's amusing when people go down this route, because it is not only funny but also highly hypocritical. For one thing, these are the same people who condemn others for saying things like "Go back to your country". Such comments, and the thinking behind



them, are racist and hostile in every sense and context. But for these people, that morality applies only when others say it; when they say it, it's fine (It's not!). The irony remains because those who say 'do not come into Dhaka' had to come to Dhaka someday, right? Many of them have been living in Dhaka for one or two generations –

maybe three at most. It is rare to find people who are what younger people would call "OG Dhakaiyans".

Also, when people say go back where you came from, it makes me wonder: how far back, and back to where, should I go? As far back as the primordial ages, when everything was essentially a protein stew in water? People who

are overzealously protective of Dhaka – were they still living in these "Dhaka lands" back then, when only single-celled organisms existed?

Given the long holiday, surely you have got a taste of what Dhaka would look like without all these "outsiders" over the past few days. These people, dismissively labelled "outsiders", are the ones who built Dhaka. Because of them, Dhaka is what it is today: a metropolitan city. And it's not like Dhaka nursed them because Dhaka loved them. Everyone knows Dhaka is probably the most unforgiving city in the country. Whoever stays in Dhaka does so because they fight every day, and Dhaka deems them worthy.

Without these "outsiders", Dhaka would be a ghost town – like it seemed during the Eid holidays. Many of the shops were closed, the city barely functioned, and whatever you needed had to wait because the people who run this city were on vacation.

Civilisation builds on collaboration. People from different places, knowledge, faith, and communities come together to build something greater. They might be "strangers" in the beginning, but once you work together, there are no more "outsiders". So, next time you think about sneering at the "outsiders", consider the fact that Dhaka needs them just as much as they need Dhaka. It is a symbiotic relationship.

## Fuel prices hold steady for April

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With prices climbing, the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) is likely to incur losses. Audit data show that over the last decade, BPC incurred losses in just one fiscal year – Tk 2,705 crore in FY22 – when domestic prices were kept below import costs as the Russia-Ukraine war drove up global oil prices.

Although the subsidy-backed pricing comes with trade-offs, the government has chosen this time to bridge the gap through the state exchequer, according to officials involved in the proceedings.

While the latest decision offers short-term relief to consumers and businesses, it risks straining public finances and complicating future price adjustments, especially if global volatility persists, the officials added.

They added that the move was driven by two priorities: providing relief to the public and curbing hoarding, which the government views as a major factor behind the current shortages at filling stations.

As of yesterday noon, district administrations seized 87,700 litres of illegally hoarded fuel in nationwide drives over the previous 24 hours. And over the month of March, authorities recovered 2.96 lakh litres of hoarded fuel during 3,559 drives and filed 1,244 cases across the country, Energy Division spokesperson Monir Hossain Chowdhury said at a Secretariat briefing yesterday.

He noted that courts fined Tk 84.51 lakh and sentenced 19 people during the month-long drive.

According to the briefing, 2,284 government

officials have been appointed as "tag officers" to monitor filling stations nationwide.

The government has, meanwhile, maintained that there is no supply shortage.

As of yesterday, stocks stood at 1,28,939 tonnes of diesel, 7,940 tonnes of octane, 11,431 tonnes of petrol, and 44,609 tonnes of jet fuel, with regular consignments on the way.

The ministry spokesperson also mentioned that there is a plan to roll out the "fuel pass" system this month.

The system would operate through a digital platform recording vehicle registration details, purchase time, and fuel quantities, allowing authorities to monitor distribution more closely.

"We are already developing an app. We hope to launch it on a trial basis in one or two locations within a week," he said.

Monir added that district administrations have been informed, and in some areas they have already begun implementing the system manually on their own initiative.

"It is not easy to implement. Bringing so many people under a single system at once is challenging. So we plan to initially target specific categories of vehicles and move to an effective stage within a week," he said.

The Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission said yesterday that it will announce the prices of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) tomorrow at a press conference.

The prices are set in line with Saudi CP benchmarks each month.

## JS heats up with debate over reform council

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the oath format for members defined, and the individual responsible for administering it clearly identified.

He further argued that by administering oaths to members of the Constitution Reform Council, the chief election commissioner had violated the constitution. "I could have asked the CEC who authorised him to issue such oath forms, but since the CEC is not present in parliament, that question cannot be raised."

The order stated that constitutional reforms must be completed within 180 days.

Salahuddin asked: "Where, then, is the supremacy of parliament and the people?" About the 70 percent "yes" vote, he said the referendum was meant only to test support for the July charter. He criticised the referendum format, saying that only one answer was given to four questions, calling the implementation order "a document of national fraud".

He stressed that no parliament can be bound or stripped of its jurisdiction by a previous parliament, and no presidential order can undermine parliamentary

sovereignty. "Under article 93 of the constitution, even ordinances cannot alter constitutional provisions. Therefore, the July charter implementation order is illegal."

The home minister said there was confusion over whether the BNP opposed reforms or the July charter. "In fact, every word of the charter signed is embraced by the BNP," he added, pointing out that he himself had proposed the referendum in the National Consensus Commission, and that the charter explicitly allows dissent notes, meaning a party can act on its manifesto if it receives a mandate.

He then affirmed that they are committed to implementing the July charter. "The people endorsed the BNP's manifesto with a 51 percent mandate, and the BNP wants to bring democratic constitutional amendments through discussions involving both ruling and opposition parties."

Proposing the special parliamentary committee on behalf of the Leader of the House Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, he said, "In that committee, we should all sit together, hold discussions, and through consensus bring forward a

constitution amendment bill that reflects the people's aspirations in this great national parliament, and adopt it on the basis of agreement."

Later, Law Minister Md Asaduzzaman also made a similar proposal.

In response, Opposition Leader Shafiqur Rahman said the discussion was about the Constitution Reform Council and convening its session, and proposed a separate special committee to convene the council.

"If you consider it appropriate after this discussion, you may form the special committee. But our appeal is that the committee should have equal numbers of members from both sides. That way, we can present our views properly."

"If the committee is formed on the basis of majority alone, then the same kind of debate we see here will continue there as well. In that case, nothing new will come out – it will be the same old story. We have expressed our intent. Now the decision rests with you."

He added, "We sincerely call upon the ruling party – since the people have accepted the referendum, if we also accept it, we will be honoring the people,

and this parliament will be honored. Let the people's aspirations be reflected through our collective initiative. If we continue to move in parallel lines – government on one side, opposition on the other – then how can there be a solution? We all understand this."

The Jamaat ameer further said, "The home minister called this order an endless deception. He said that the interim government and the president together did this. The order was issued on November 13 last year. And the vote took place on February 12 this year. Because of their [BNP's] demand, the parliament and the referendum were held on the same day, and the government formally congratulated them. So, the referendum was also their demand."

Also, Shafiqur said that both he and Prime Minister Tarique Rahman sought "yes" vote in the referendum.

"We did not change our position," he said, adding that if the referendum is called unconstitutional, then many past referendums will come into question.

Law Minister Asaduzzaman, in his address, termed the July

charter implementation order both a "colourable legislation" – a law that appears valid but exceeds the legislature's power, often disguising an unconstitutional purpose – and a "fraud on the constitution".

He criticised the opposition's demand for a "50-50" membership split in the proposed committee, terming it unfair as the BNP has 209 MPs while the opposition alliance has 77 MPs.

Jamaat-e-Islami MP Najibur Rahman said that, according to article 152 of the constitution, a president's order is a law.

Jamaat's Nurul Islam said, "According to the constitution, elections must be held within 90 days of parliament's dissolution. Was that done? No... The current constitution says elections should be in 2029. How did we hold them in 2026 then? Does that mean parliament, government – everything – is illegal?"

National Citizen Party MP Akhtar Hossain said that the implementation of the July charter and the formation of a Constitution Reform Council are matters of political goodwill on the part of the ruling party.

"Why do they now refuse to accept the verdict

of the referendum? The people voted in favour of implementing the July National Charter. To call that verdict unconstitutional is arrogant and a disgrace to parliament."

NCP MP Hasnat Abdullah pointed out how the constitution is valued only when certain sections suit certain parties. "The fall of Hasina came through blood, sweat, and toil of every anti-fascist party. Popular verdicts never bow their heads to books."

Andaleev Rahman Partha said they are not against the July charter but are raising questions about the process. "We respect the July charter and its spirit. We respect the constitution... At the same time, we must find a way to uplift the spirit of July."

"Many talk about discarding the constitution. Is it because the constitution reminds them of the defeat of 1971? Why should I throw it away? If I dislike it, there are provisions within the constitution itself to amend it. Why discard it entirely?"

To the NCP and July fighters, he said, "You represent Gen-Z. Don't make yourselves a part of the Jamaat generation."

## Govt moves to repatriate illicit funds from 10 territories

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Bangladesh already has MLATs with India and South Africa.

Zahid Hussain, former lead economist at the World Bank's Dhaka office, cautioned that treaties alone are insufficient, because laundered funds are, in his words, "very footloose".

Once launderers learn that Bangladesh has signed an agreement with a particular country, they move the money elsewhere, forcing investigators to begin the chase anew.

"You are chasing a moving target," Zahid said.

Zahid is sceptical about the prospect of recovering much of the funds, with legal obstacles adding to the challenge.

"The possibility [of recovering the funds] is very low," he told The Daily Star

yesterday. He explained that the legal process lies outside Bangladesh's jurisdiction.

"One has to apply the laws of the country where the money entered. First, it must be frozen, then seized, and then transferred by applying the laws of both countries," he said.

Even securing a freeze is only the beginning. Authorities must prove not only that funds left Bangladesh illegally, but also how they were originally earned, since both legitimate and illicit money flows abroad. "That's why I say the process is very long," Zahid said.

The picture is more encouraging where assets have been sunk into physical property, according to him.

Cases involving real estate investment, such as that of Saifuzzaman Chowdhury, former land

minister under the Awami League government, offer better prospects.

"You can sell them and move the cash, but you cannot move the house itself." By contrast, he said, "assets like cash in banks, the share market, or bond markets can travel very easily."

Additionally, the forensic work required to trace funds is formidable. "One has to identify who took the money, through which route, what form it is in now, and where it is invested," Zahid said. "It requires capacity and involves costs, and after spending for it, the return you might get is not certain."

To sharpen its asset recovery efforts, the BFIU has established a dedicated Stolen Asset Recovery Division.

The unit has received

technical assistance and training from international bodies, including the US Department of Justice, the International Anti-Corruption Centre, the Stolen Asset Recovery Initiative and the International Centre for Asset Recovery.

Bangladeshi courts have ordered the attachment of immovable properties worth Tk 8,900 crore and the freezing of movable assets worth Tk 4,400 crore held overseas – a combined total of Tk 13,200 crore.

To enforce those orders, 23 mutual legal assistance requests have been dispatched to relevant jurisdictions, with another 21 in preparation.

According to the White Paper Drafting Committee established by the interim government, illicit financial

outflows from Bangladesh between 2009 and 2023 totalled an estimated \$234 billion, an average of \$16 billion a year.

An inter-agency task force, comprising 11 members from across the government and chaired by the governor of Bangladesh Bank, was formed in September 2024 to coordinate recovery efforts and prevent future outflows.

Data from Washington-based think tank Global Financial Integrity (GFI) underscores the severity of the problem. In a report published on March 27, the organisation estimated that Bangladesh lost approximately \$68 billion to illicit financial outflows between 2013 and 2022 – about \$6.8 billion a year.

Zahid noted the sharp deterioration. Between

2003 and 2012, the figure was \$1.3 billion. "It has increased sixfold," he said.

Of the total, around \$32.8 billion flowed to advanced economies, according to the report.

GFI's analysis, covering 24 developing Asian economies, placed Bangladesh among the 10 worst-affected countries in the region.

The dominant mechanism, Zahid said, was trade misinvoicing: under-invoicing in export and over-invoicing in import.

"For those matters, the roles of the Financial Intelligence Unit and the NBR [National Board of Revenue] are the most significant," he said. "They must take on this role and increase surveillance."

## Bangladesh highly exposed to Hormuz squeeze

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Bangladesh, Japan, Thailand, South Korea, Singapore, India, China and the EU depend most on the Strait, with their dependency ranging from 95 percent to 7 percent respectively.

In LNG segment, the most dependent countries are Pakistan and Bangladesh (89 and 71 percent respectively). India imports 53 percent of its LNG through the strait. The other named countries depend between 6-25 percent on that single strait, which is 55 kilometre wide at its narrowest point.

With the Hormuz, two-thirds of global seaborne oil and gas supplies depend on a small number of chokepoints including the Strait of Malacca, Suez Canal and Panama Canal.

Global energy markets can appear stable until such chokepoints are disrupted, at which point vulnerabilities become immediately visible through price spikes and supply constraints, the report said.

Bangladesh and Pakistan have previously experienced such shocks, such as the 2022 global gas crisis when rising prices forced them out of the LNG spot market.

Despite expectations of ample global supply in the coming years, the report cautions that structural dependence on a handful of maritime routes leaves import-reliant economies exposed to recurring volatility.

Analysts warn that without diversifying supply routes and expanding domestic refining capacity, the country will remain exposed to recurring crises driven by geopolitical tensions far beyond its borders.

After Pakistan and