

The Daily Star

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Yet another tragic fire at a factory

Govt must ensure Keraniganj factory fire is the last of such accidents

It is outrageous that fires at illegally-run factories keep claiming lives in our country, while authorities continue to produce patchwork solutions to address these recurring man-made disasters. On Sunday, a fire at a gas lighter manufacturing plant in Keraniganj took the lives of at least six people, including a young girl, and injured at least 15. It is feared that the death toll may rise, as several workers are still missing.

According to locals, there were at least 40 workers on the factory premises—mostly women and children—and many could not escape through the main gate, as it was locked during the fire. Although it was opened later, many workers had to find alternative ways to escape. This reminds us of the incident at the Rupnagar garment factory, where a chemical fire at an adjacent building took the lives of 16 workers, including minors, last year. They too could not escape the smoke and toxic fumes because the door to the roof was padlocked. Another disturbing similarity the Keraniganj fire shares with the Rupnagar fire is the lack of fire safety measures. Worse still, the factory was closed following a fire in 2024; yet it kept on operating without legal papers.

Sadly, similar disregard for the law appears to persist among many enterprises and business owners in this country. Otherwise, how can hazardous factories continue to operate in residential areas, as in the case of Rupnagar, or a minor as young as 12 work in a gas lighter manufacturing plant, as in Keraniganj? In fact, the way almost every unlicensed hazardous factory operates in Bangladesh is itself an accident waiting to happen. Thus, it is not a surprise that many of them lack fire safety measures or even a proper evacuation plan in case of fire.

While we appreciate that ministers visited the scene and announced financial help and medical treatment for the victims, this is not where their responsibility ends. The factory owner must be brought to justice, and the departments that failed to ensure that the shuttered factory remained closed must also be held accountable. Two probe committees were formed to investigate the incident, but such actions in the past have done little to prevent similar accidents from recurring. Therefore, we urge the government to take stern action based on the findings of the probe reports. The government must ensure that the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments has the manpower and resources to conduct routine drives against hazardous factories that operate without legal documentation or employ minors. Meanwhile, relevant authorities must ensure that all businesses and private enterprises have fire and building safety protocols and systems in place. Labour may be cheap in Bangladesh, but it must never be mistaken for cheap lives.

Protect Narsingdi's rivers

Stop polluters, restore navigability

It is deeply concerning that rivers flowing through Narsingdi are facing a severe environmental crisis. Once vital lifelines sustaining surrounding communities and ecosystems, rivers such as the Shitalakkhya, Meghna, Brahmaputra, Arial Kha, Haridhoa, and Paharia are now being pushed to the brink by the unchecked discharge of untreated industrial waste. A report in this daily has laid bare the scale of degradation, exposing the long-standing failure of authorities to regulate industrial pollution in the district.

Over the years, rapid and unplanned industrial expansion along riverbanks has gone on with little regard for environmental protection. Factories have been releasing toxic effluent directly into rivers, severely contaminating the water. Illegal encroachment along the riverbanks has further worsened the situation. For much of the year, even small boats struggle to navigate many rivers due to reduced flow. Several rivers now have critically low dissolved oxygen levels. Even during the monsoon, when water levels typically rise, oxygen remains dangerously low, making survival difficult for fish and other aquatic life.

Among these rivers, the 38 km Haridhoa ranks second among the most polluted rivers in the country. According to a study by the River and Delta Research Centre, its dissolved oxygen level has dropped to a shocking 0.6 mg/L—far below what is needed to sustain aquatic life—while its alkalinity poses serious risks to biodiversity and human health. Although Tk 10 crore was allocated a year ago to address pollution in the river, the funds have yet to be fully disbursed. Such delays allow environmental degradation to continue unchecked. Meanwhile, initiatives such as re-excavating river channels to restore navigability are unlikely to succeed unless pollution is effectively checked.

In 2019, the High Court delivered a landmark judgment declaring rivers as "living entities" and appointing the then National River Protection Commission (now the National River Conservation Commission) as their legal guardian. The court also issued a series of directives to protect our rivers. Sadly, little has changed since then, with most of our rivers still on the verge of destruction. This situation cannot be allowed to continue.

We urge the government to take bold, decisive action against polluters and encroachers. Regulatory bodies, including the Department of Environment and the National River Conservation Commission, must step up efforts to protect the rivers in Narsingdi and throughout the country. Polluting industries must also be compelled to install and operate effluent treatment plants without exception. Without urgent and visible action, too many of our rivers could soon reach a point of no recovery.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

US officially enters World War I

On this day in 1917, two days after the US Senate voted 82 to 6 to declare war against Germany, the US House of Representatives endorses the declaration by a vote of 373 to 50. As a result, America formally entered World War I.

When reform becomes more power, less accountability



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With the parliamentary politics once again becoming vibrant and engaging, a clear fault line is gradually emerging between the ruling party, BNP, and the opposition, Jamaat-e-Islami (JI). Not too long ago, these two parties were political allies—both in government and in opposition—jointly leading street movements against the rise of authoritarian rule under Sheikh Hasina and her Awami League. Their eventual split largely stemmed from a redrawing of the country's political landscape following the uprising against Hasina's dictatorial regime, which ultimately consigned her party to political irrelevance.

Both parties have been victims of egregious abuses of power, including the criminalisation of state institutions under Hasina's rule. They endured severe persecution—enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, fabricated charges, prolonged detention without trial, and brutal physical violence. At one point, their political futures appeared nearly extinguished due to the judiciary's partisan alignment with the executive. In response, both parties championed sweeping reforms in governance and key state institutions, particularly the judiciary, security apparatus, and law enforcement,

The 13-member parliamentary committee also proposed that 15 ordinances be introduced in amended form, while 16 others should be deferred for further revision rather than presented as bills now. Most strikingly, the committee recommended scrapping four ordinances outright, three of which relate to judicial reforms widely considered essential for ensuring judicial independence.

with a shared commitment to accountability and the rule of law.

In the newly redrawn political landscape, both parties continue to profess support for fundamental reforms, though their interpretations diverge significantly. The reform process initiated by the interim government led by Professor Yunus—through 11 thematic commissions and a National Consensus Commission—resulted in the July National Charter as well as 133 ordinances aimed at overhauling governance and state institutions. Subsequently, the newly elected Jatiya Sangshad formed a parliamentary committee

that recommended legal validation of 98 of these ordinances without amendment. At first glance, such broad agreement might suggest an impressive level of political consensus. A closer examination, however, reveals a far more troubling picture. The 13-member parliamentary committee also proposed that 15 ordinances be introduced in amended form, while 16 others

should be deferred for further revision rather than presented as bills now. Most strikingly, the committee recommended scrapping four ordinances outright, three of which relate to judicial reforms widely considered essential for ensuring judicial independence. Reactions from the opposition alliance led by JI, as well as from prominent non-partisan civil society actors and rights groups, suggest that these decisions represent a significant step backward.

The committee report includes notes of dissent from opposition members but none from those



FILE VISUAL: ALITZA RAHMAN

on the treasury bench. Three opposition MPs formally objected to 12 ordinances. These dynamics point to a disturbing pattern: rather than exercising independent judgment, many lawmakers appear to have adhered strictly to party directives. Notably, the report omits mention of a ruling party MP who submitted a detailed letter opposing the decision

effectively revive earlier practices that allowed significant executive influence over judicial appointments and the lower judiciary. This is especially striking given that many senior BNP leaders, including Tarique Rahman and Khaleda Zia, have themselves suffered from what many describe as the weaponisation of the judiciary under the previous regime. There are also suggestions that elements within the bureaucracy have resisted the creation of an independent judicial secretariat—claims that the government should address transparently to justify its position.

Equally concerning is the apparent retreat from efforts to strengthen institutional accountability. The parliamentary committee's recommendation to defer (meaning allowing to lapse) 16 ordinances includes key legislation such as reforms to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). Allowing this ordinance to lapse could effectively dismantle the current NHRC, which has arguably the potential to be the most effective in the country's history, as its members include experts who have investigated over 1,500 cases of enforced disappearance while leading a different probe commission. Reports indicate resistance from security agencies and bureaucratic actors to empowering the NHRC, particularly regarding its authority to investigate abuses and operate independently.

It is particularly troubling that a party with a significant number of victims of enforced disappearances now appears to accept national security justifications for limiting oversight. Such a position not only contradicts the spirit of the July mass uprising but also undermines fundamental human rights obligations. Mere pledges by the BNP to bring back these legislations with improved and stronger safeguards are least assuring, as such revisions could have been made during the ongoing process of validating other ordinances.

The opposition JI members of the committee are not without fault. Their revisionist proposals—particularly the suggestion to remove references to Jamaat-e-Islami, Muslim League, and Nezam-e-Islami as collaborators with Pakistani forces from the ordinance on Muktijoddha Council—are deeply problematic. This effort to sanitise historical wrongdoing avoids necessary accountability and reconciliation. A more responsible approach would involve acknowledging past actions and offering a formal apology. How JI's allies, especially the NCP, a party born out of the uprising and led by its youth leaders, respond to such revisionist tendencies remains to be seen.

Frugality is key to withstanding the energy shocks



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Given the current worldwide energy crises, economic uncertainties, and rising geopolitical tensions, the principles of frugality and sustainable consumption are essential measures for preparing for major crises and conflicts. Practising mindful consumption today can strengthen us to withstand the shocks of tomorrow.

Frugality begins at home. Simple actions such as turning off lights and appliances when not in use, choosing energy-efficient devices, and minimising water wastage can reduce household energy consumption and contribute to broader resource conservation. Sustainable consumption also urges us to reconsider our purchasing habits, given that each unnecessary purchase carries hidden environmental costs such as the energy used in production, transportation, packaging, and disposal. Prioritising essential needs over wants can not only conserve resources but also builds financial resilience, which is crucial in times of crisis.

The government has already taken several measures to address energy shortages and resource management issues. Policies promoting energy efficiency, renewable energy adoption, regulated peak-hour electricity use, and public transport initiatives are steps in the right direction. However, the challenge lies in implementing and managing these measures effectively. Policies alone cannot achieve sustainable outcomes. Individuals must internalise these principles, ensuring that energy-saving behaviours, mindful consumption, and resource-conscious choices are practised consistently. Balancing economic development with energy conservation is delicate but essential. Of course, growth is necessary, but it must not come at the cost of depleting vital resources or weakening national resilience.

Travel, a significant contributor to energy consumption and carbon emissions, is another area where frugality matters. While mobility is important, frequent long distance

trips or luxury travel during crises place additional strain on already struggling resources. Opting for local trips, combining journeys, or postponing non-essential travel reduces energy use, saves costs, and mitigates environmental impact. Using public transport, cycling, and carpooling further enhances sustainability practices while fostering collective preparedness.

Frugality is also a preparatory strategy for crisis management during wars or periods of geopolitical instability. Global conflicts often disrupt supply chains, increase resource scarcity, and create sudden pressures on energy or finances. Individuals and communities that practise frugality by conserving energy, limiting unnecessary consumption, and focusing on essential needs are naturally better equipped to withstand such shocks. Sustainable consumption becomes a form of strategic resilience, ensuring that families and societies can maintain stability even in extreme circumstances.

It should be noted that frugality does not equal deprivation. It is a deliberate, ethical approach to consumption that is guided by necessity, sustainability, and foresight. Every choice—from energy use to shopping habits to travel decisions—contributes to a better collective capacity for managing crises. Minimising food waste, choosing

reusable products, and supporting local goods reduce environmental pressures while building economic and social resilience. Each small action compounds to protect energy resources, reduce emissions, and maintain essential supply systems. Moreover, frugality reinforces national resilience. By limiting unnecessary expenditure and adopting energy-efficient practices, citizens contribute to the stability of the economy and the conservation of critical resources. In periods of conflict, the merit of these habits is felt strongly as they reduce dependence on strained supply chains and help create a buffer against sudden shortages.

Ultimately, sustainable consumption and frugality are essential acts of foresight and responsibility. Small, consistent choices can have far-reaching effects. The ongoing energy crisis, combined with global instability, demands that we embrace frugality as a guiding principle. By adopting sustainable consumption habits, supporting relevant policy measures, and prioritising essential needs, we can balance economic development with energy conservation while preparing for potential crises and conflicts. We must commit to frugality not as deprivation, but as a conscious strategy to ensure environmental sustainability, personal resilience, and societal preparedness.