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## Early closure will hurt business

Govt should shift trading hours, enforce smarter in-store energy use

Any government facing an energy crunch reaches instinctively for the most visible lever available. If the lights are on, switch them off. If shops are open, shut them early. The logic is simple. However, the economics of the early closure, more often than not, are far less convincing. The new administration first ordered shops and malls nationwide to close at 6pm, citing fuel shortages triggered by the Middle East conflict. After pushback from the business community, the deadline was extended by one hour. Retailers remain unimpressed, and with reason. An extra 60 minutes feels less like a solution and more like a token adjustment.

The problem lies in how retail actually works in Bangladesh. This is, fundamentally, an evening economy. After long workdays, oppressive heat, and relentless traffic, consumers arrive at markets and malls only after dusk. Per industry estimates, nearly 60 percent of daily retail sales take place during these evening hours. This is not a matter of preference but constraint. Cutting off that window does not shift demand into the daytime but simply erases it.

The cost of that decision is not trivial. Retail supports as many as 120 crore jobs across the country. A large portion of these are part-time workers—students, secondary earners, and young people from lower-income households—whose livelihoods depend precisely on evening shifts. When the hours shrink, so do their incomes. However, retail accounts for roughly three percent of national electricity consumption. Even the broader commercial sector consumes only 8-10 percent.

There is also a fiscal dimension. Retail is a steady source of value added tax revenue. Industry estimates suggest that early closure could cut these receipts by up to 20 percent. At a time when public finances are already under strain, this amounts to an odd form of self-inflicted pressure—a policy that weakens the state's own revenue stream for limited gains on the energy front.

Consumer sentiment, already fragile, is another casualty. Fuel shortages and transport disruptions began to dampen spending even before the directive. Retailers experienced a subdued Eid-ul-Fitr season. Now, with restricted hours and ongoing uncertainty, the run-up to Eid-ul-Azha, typically a peak retail period, looks increasingly uncertain. When sales slow at the storefront, the effects ripple backwards through distributors, manufacturers, and the informal networks that sustain them.

There is, however, a more workable path, one that balances energy savings with economic reality. Several industry groups have already outlined practical alternatives. Trading hours could shift later into the day, from around 1pm to 9pm, avoiding the peak midday electricity load. Air-conditioning could be capped at 25 degrees Celsius or higher. Non-essential decorative lighting should be curtailed. And there should be a concerted move towards energy-efficient equipment. The current closure order offers modest relief to the grid, but the economic cost it imposes is far heavier. Crises demand hard choices, but they also demand that those choices be the right ones.

## Ensure justice for wildlife cruelty

Elephant calf stoned to death in latest human-wildlife contact

A heartbreaking image has been circulating on the web for the past few days—two grown elephants standing next to a dead baby elephant in a shallow ditch. The pair stood by the deceased calf for three days before finally walking away. Initially, it was thought that the calf might have fallen from a hill, or perhaps it was yet another of nature's cruel tricks. But turns out, the baby elephant was a victim of human cruelty—the calf was stoned to death. The ditch where the grieving elephants stood for days was later identified as an illegal fish enclosure in Naikhongchhari upazila in Bandarban.

Regardless of the circumstances that led to the stoning—multiple blows, in fact—the question remains: why? Why would anyone with an iota of humanity inflict such harm on a defenceless child, regardless of its species? And what does such cruelty say about the state of our society?

If we zoom out, cruelty towards wildlife and animals in general in Bangladesh is far from uncommon; it is becoming alarmingly frequent. In particular, human-wildlife conflict has been rising in recent years, often as a direct result of expanding human activities into forested areas. As development projects, settlements, and unregulated land use continue to shrink natural habitats, animals are increasingly forced into human localities.

This is particularly evident in the case of elephants. Their traditional corridors, used for generations, have been replaced by roads, settlements, and agricultural expansion. The situation has been further aggravated in recent years by large-scale deforestation linked to the influx of the displaced Rohingya population. With fewer safe pathways, elephants often wander into farmlands, destroying crops and livelihoods. For example, we may remember the case of an elephant that was electrocuted in 2023 in Sherpur, after locals set up live wires to keep animals away from crops.

So, we call upon the government to investigate the Bandarban killing and hold those responsible accountable. The widening gap between crimes committed against animals, including wildlife, and the justice delivered must be bridged. It is also imperative to protect elephant corridors, regulate illegal land use, and invest in conflict mitigation strategies that support both communities and wildlife. For example, beehives have proven to provide a natural fence from wild animals, and promising results have been seen in Teknaf. All in all, we must treat this incident with the urgency it requires. If we fail to do so, the images of grieving elephants may not remain disturbing anomalies but a haunting norm with a worrying indication as to where we are headed as a society.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

### 2001 Mars Odyssey launched

On this day in 2001, NASA launched the 2001 Mars Odyssey spacecraft, which reached Mars in October and transmitted photos and other data back to scientists on Earth.

# Energy, ports, and logistics: Rethinking our supply chain



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Persistent tensions in the Middle East, the resultant disruptions in key shipping routes, and the volatility in fuel access and prices are once again reminding the world of a hard truth: that energy security is no longer just about supply but also about having durable systems and structures in place. For Bangladesh, this reality is becoming increasingly visible. Fuel shortages, load-shedding, and the emergency conservation measures being rolled out by the government are all symptoms of a deeper structural vulnerability.

At first glance, Bangladesh's situation may appear similar to that of many large economies that are also facing energy pressures. China, for instance, has experienced periodic power shortages and supply disruptions in recent years. But the similarities end there. While China manages energy stress as part of a complex system, Bangladesh experiences it as a crisis. The difference really lies in preparedness for such a situation as well as energy structure.

China's energy challenge is fundamentally one of scale. Temporary shortages arise when industrial demand spikes, hydropower is affected by drought, or price controls distort supply incentives. But these disruptions rarely escalate into systemic crises. China has built layers of resilience: strategic petroleum reserves, diversified import sources, strong domestic production, and rapidly expanding renewable capacity.

Most importantly, it treats energy as an integrated national system. Coal, gas, renewables—both domestic and imports—are managed within a coordinated framework. The state retains the capacity to redirect supply and intervene quickly when imbalances emerge. Its investments in solar and wind power, battery storage, and electric mobility are aimed at sustainability and reducing vulnerability.

Closer to home, India has strengthened energy security through strategic petroleum reserves, diversified sourcing, and rapid renewable expansion. It has invested in solar power and LNG infrastructure, supported by improved port capacity. Although the Middle East crisis created a localised supply disruption of LPG in

India—used largely for cooking—the country has been successfully aligning its energy planning with logistics and infrastructure development. In contrast, Pakistan offers a cautionary example. Its heavy reliance on imported fuels, coupled with foreign exchange constraints and limited domestic production, has periodically forced emergency measures.

Bangladesh, too, imports around 95 percent of its fuel needs—oil, LNG, and coal. This means global disruptions translate almost immediately into domestic pressure. When prices rise or shipping routes become uncertain,

the economy. Yet, our energy planning has historically remained largely disconnected from logistics and port infrastructure.

This has real consequences. Congestion at terminals, draft limitations, and coordination gaps between port operations and downstream distribution can delay the clearance of energy cargo. During global disruptions, even minor inefficiencies can escalate into supply delays. For a country without strategic reserves, such delays quickly translate into shortages.

China again provides a contrast here. Its energy security strategy extends beyond procurement or production to logistics integration. Investments in ports, shipping capacity, and overland corridors reduce exposure to disruption. Energy is secured not just at the source but across the entire supply chain.

Bangladesh has yet to adopt such an integrated perspective. Investments have focused largely on

supply routes must be diversified. Overreliance on limited maritime corridors increases exposure to geopolitical risk. Expanding routing options and improving regional connectivity can provide flexibility. Third, Bangladesh should develop strategic reserves. Even modest storage capacity can buffer short-term disruptions and reduce immediate vulnerability.

Fourth, our renewable energy transition must be accelerated as a strategic necessity. In this regard, the rooftop spaces of industrial and logistics infrastructure can be used for solar power generation. Ports, inland container depots, off-dock facilities, and large warehouse clusters already possess vast, contiguous rooftop spaces that remain largely unused. A targeted rooftop solar programme based on on-grid systems with net metering can allow these facilities to generate power for internal use while feeding surplus into the grid.

Fourth, our renewable energy transition must be accelerated as a strategic necessity. In this regard, Bangladesh's most immediate opportunity lies not in residential rooftops—often constrained by ownership complexities—but in industrial and logistics infrastructure. Ports, inland container depots, off-dock facilities, and large warehouse clusters already possess vast, contiguous rooftop spaces that remain largely unused. A targeted rooftop solar programme based on on-grid systems with net metering can allow these facilities to generate power for internal use while feeding surplus into the grid.

To accelerate adoption, the government could introduce structured incentives, such as linking solar investments with future electricity bill adjustments or targeted subsidies, thereby turning major energy consumers into distributed producers. In a land-scarce country, this industrial rooftop model offers one of the most practical pathways to reducing import dependence while strengthening energy resilience.

Finally, institutional coordination must improve. Energy, ports, and logistics remain fragmented across multiple agencies; a unified framework aligned with national logistics reform can bridge these gaps. Bangladesh does not need to replicate other countries' models, but it can draw key lessons from them. Energy security is achieved through systems that integrate infrastructure, logistics, finance, and policy, not just supply contracts. The ongoing crisis, despite being challenging, also offers the opportunity to prepare well for disruptions.



FILE PHOTO: MD RAJIB RATHAN

the country has limited capacity to absorb the shock. This explains why government responses often appear reactive. Cutting office hours, closing markets early, rationing fuel, and a potential shift to online classes are necessary in the short term, but they do not address the structural issue. They are demand-control measures in a system that lacks supply-side resilience.

At the heart of this vulnerability lies a dimension often overlooked: logistics. Energy does not simply exist in reserves or contracts; it moves through supply chains. For Bangladesh, those supply chains begin and end at its ports. More than 90 percent of the country's trade, including energy imports, is transported by sea. Every shipment of oil, LNG or coal must pass through maritime gateways before it can power

power generation capacity, while supply chain resilience has received less attention. In stable times, this gap remains hidden. During crises, it becomes critical.

There is also a financial dimension. Rising fuel import costs place immediate pressure on foreign exchange reserves. Bangladesh operates under tighter constraints. This increases sensitivity to both price volatility and supply disruptions.

Going forward, we must rethink energy security as a system-level issue. It must be embedded within logistics and supply chain strategy. First, port infrastructure must be strengthened. Improving handling efficiency, expanding storage capacity, and reducing vessel turnaround time are essential to energy security. Second,

# Why the Ganges water treaty needs a climate-ready reset



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The 1996 Ganges Water Treaty (GWT) is approaching the end of its life cycle, with the 30-year treaty set to expire in December 2026. While there are several questions floating around—including whether this treaty should be continued or terminated—the most important one is this: how can Bangladesh reach a fair and efficient agreement with India regarding the water use in the Ganges basin once the treaty expires? Currently, the main challenges posed to the GWT are related to climate change, upstream development, and the treaty's inherent flaws.

The treaty established a scheme for sharing flows of the Ganges during the dry season between January and May, and its design relied on hydrological data from 1949 to 1988. One of the problems with this treaty was its reliance on historical average water flow data to decide water allocation in an ever-changing system. Most of the annual precipitation in South Asia is accumulated during the monsoon season, and the rest flows through the Ganges during the low-flow period. Thus, any shift in precipitation rates or upstream consumption or withdrawal

will significantly affect this system, rendering historical average data irrelevant.

Over the last two decades, empirical evidence has shown that the water regime in the Ganges has shifted in India's favour. In many cases, Bangladesh received lower water flow per 10-day period at Hardinge Bridge than the amounts allocated under the agreement—especially during the dry season—according to releases from the Farakka dam. According to a study that compared the actual yearly release from Farakka and the corresponding flow at Hardinge Bridge between 1997 and 2016, around 31 percent of the time (or, 94 out of 300 events), Bangladesh received less water at Hardinge Bridge compared to what presumably was released from Farakka.

The fact that a part of Bangladesh receives less water than it is supposed to receive under the treaty poses severe problems for the country. For the agricultural sector, fisheries, and ecosystems, what is crucial is the actual amount of flow at the downstream rather than its allocation at the upstream point. On the other hand, India's perspective in negotiating over

this issue should also be considered. The increasing upstream water demand, the water security of states in the region, and India's emphasis on complying with the treaty frame its negotiation strategy.

These factors indicate one of the major flaws in the treaty design—the lack of a sound method for resolving disputes. Although joint monitoring and periodic discussion of disagreements can be considered a solution, no effective verification of release volumes nor dispute resolution mechanisms are envisioned in it. Thus, any dispute ends up in negotiations, often resulting in procrastination.

Climate change is intensifying these challenges by introducing even greater variability in the Ganges' hydrological cycle. It is known that decreased snow persistence in the Himalayas and altered river regimes have resulted in lower flows and increased interannual variability. According to research, flows at Hardinge Bridge have fallen dramatically since the establishment of the treaty. Against the backdrop of this changing hydrologic picture, there is a need to rethink the whole framework of the treaty. Therefore, four major priorities arise for Bangladesh in negotiating over this agreement.

First, it is essential to achieve full data transparency to create mutual understanding between the two parties regarding the situation and to facilitate further cooperation. Second, the idea of guaranteeing flow volume should be revised, with Bangladesh emphasising the importance of guaranteed flow at Hardinge Bridge

rather than at Farakka. Third, the allocation should be revised to account for climatic variability using a rolling baseline of hydrological data. Fourth, the dispute resolution mechanism should be introduced.

Apart from technical solutions, another challenge emerges concerning the strategic approach to negotiating the agreement. The current treaty is based on bilateral agreements, which may be too limited to address the problem at hand. Indeed, there are good grounds for considering cooperation with Nepal to manage flows of the Ganges River during the dry season. Nevertheless, while negotiating this kind of cooperation, it is important for Bangladesh to recognise several pitfalls, namely, substantial investments, a lengthy decision-making process, and political alignment among all parties involved. Therefore, the most practical solution would be to renegotiate the agreement in a bilateral format but incorporating recent changes into its provisions.

It goes without saying that allowing the treaty to expire without negotiating anything would be a dangerous choice. In the event of the termination of the existing agreement, Bangladesh will lose an already-established monitoring system, leaving it in an even more vulnerable position than before. On the other hand, merely renewing the agreement would mean repeating previous mistakes, thereby locking Bangladesh into a lengthy, problematic deal. The key lies somewhere in between.