



Workers carry baskets of hilsa at the Cox's Bazar Fishery Ghat. In areas like Cox's Bazar, hilsa can complete their full lifecycle in the sea and reach greater maturity. This photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: MOKAMMEL SHUVO

Bangladesh getting smaller hilsa due to aggressive fishing

Average size now six-year low, says expert

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Overfishing, use of illegal nets, and capturing juvenile hilsa – locally known as jatka – contribute towards lowering the average size and egg production of hilsa, a fisheries expert said yesterday.

Intense fishing in the rivers significantly reduces the population size of larger fish, whittling the pool down to only contain smaller fish. In comparison, hilsa in the sea can complete their lifecycle without such interference, resulting in improved growth and reproduction. Lower pollution levels in the sea also help in the process.

Mohammad Ashraf Alam, senior scientific officer at Bangladesh Fisheries Research Institute, said that a variation in hilsa size is perceived across regions, which is primarily linked to environmental conditions and migration patterns.

He made the remarks during his presentation at a seminar marking Jatka Conservation Week 2026, April 7-13, observed under the theme: "Stop catching jatka, and rivers and seas will be full of hilsa," held at the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council

Auditorium in Dhaka.

The average length of hilsa has shown fluctuations over the years, the presentation showed. It remained steady at 35.7 cm in the fiscal years 2019-20 and 2020-21, then increased to 37.0 cm in 2021-22 and 37.2 cm in 2022-23.

However, the trend reversed in the following years, with the average length declining to 36.6 cm in 2023-24, 34.7 cm in 2024-25, and further dropping to 34.0 cm in 2025-26.

Alam said that the overall decrease in average hilsa length in recent years is the result of multiple combined factors, including overfishing, catching jatka, human interventions, environmental changes, declining water quality, and reduced food availability in rivers.

In areas like Cox's Bazar, where fish can complete their full lifecycle in the sea, they reach greater maturity, resulting in higher average length and weight, he said.

The largest hilsa in the country are found in the Cox's Bazar region, with an average length of 38.5 centimetres (cm) and an average weight of 780 grams.

In contrast, the smallest hilsa are

found in the Rajshahi region, with an average length of 29 cm and an average weight of 340 grams. Here, fish are confined to river systems, where growth conditions are less favourable, he added.

High intensity of fishing in the rivers, as well as the use of illegal nets, leads to frequent capture of larger fish, while smaller ones remain. Over time, this selective removal causes a decline in the population of large-sized fish in river systems, he added.

During migration from the sea to the rivers, overfishing in coastal areas further reduces the number of mature fish, as many are caught before they can reproduce, he said.

Rising levels of pollution and scarcity of food in the rivers also negatively affect hilsa growth and development.

Meanwhile, the estimated egg production of hilsa has increased over the years, starting at 599,720 kg in 2015, rising steadily to 786,314 kg in 2021, 805,515 kg in 2023, 811,711 kg in 2024, and reaching 884,802 kg in 2025.

However, projections for 2025 show a mixed trend, with one estimate reaching 884,802 kg, indicating an increase, while another estimate of

791,564 kg reflects a decline.

The recent drop in projected egg production is linked to the same underlying causes explained before, as the reduction in large, mature breeding fish directly affects reproductive output, Alam added.

Fisheries, Livestock and Agriculture Minister Mohammad Aminur Rashid said that scientists need to engage more actively in research and work systematically to maximise jatka production and accurately induce egg hatching in hilsa to increase their numbers.

The minister said that scientists must explore ways to boost hilsa production while preserving their taste and quality, ensuring the country's demand is met.

Terming hilsa shortage as a nationwide problem, he stressed that production must be increased to make this fish accessible to the general public.

In his speech as a special guest, State Minister for Fisheries and Livestock Sultan Salahuddin Tuku said that when jatka fishing is completely stopped, hilsa production will increase significantly, which can contribute greatly to the country's economic prosperity.

Time to scale solar power is now

TARIQ ALAM

Solar power is often discussed as a policy ambition in Bangladesh, one which has become more pertinent given the ongoing global energy uncertainty and price volatility.

Bangladesh's energy security depends on how quickly renewable ambitions translate into real projects – spearheaded by solar.

Developing around 5,000 Megawatt peak (MWp) of solar could require over Tk 35,000 crore in generation investment, excluding land and supporting infrastructure – making bankable projects and investor confidence essential.

In Bangladesh, 1 MWp of solar capacity can generate roughly 1.4 million kilowatt-hour (kWh) annually, highlighting solar's potential contribution to the national power supply.

International experience shows that countries can scale solar from negligible levels to 20-30 per cent of installed capacity within a decade or even faster when supported by clear policy frameworks, bankable procurement structures and coordinated infrastructure planning.

Despite repeated policy commitments and long-term energy planning, solar deployment in Bangladesh has remained limited – and this is solely because of an incomplete implementation framework.

In several cases, projects were awarded without confirmed land access, grid interconnection or developers demonstrating the financial and technical capability required to deliver utility-scale projects.

As a result, many projects lacked the capacity to achieve financial closure or progress to construction within expected timeframes.

Solar prices are influenced by technology costs but, in Bangladesh, are primarily driven by financing conditions, land constraints, infrastructure requirements and project risks.

While concessional financing is available, the challenge is deploying it at scale. Lower financing costs require reducing project risk through bankable power purchase agreements (PPAs), strong payment security and credible project pipelines.

Institutions such as Infrastructure Development Company can play a role through blended finance and credit enhancement structures, particularly if scaled and aligned with utility-scale project requirements, while foreign exchange risk mitigation can help unlock international capital.

The transition toward competitive solar tenders represents an important step forward.

Successful projects require key fundamentals from the outset. Developers should demonstrate secure land rights, confirm sites are dispute-free and obtain preliminary grid interconnection approval.

Financial capability should be supported by credible commitments from experienced institutions, with bid bonds and performance guarantees discouraging speculative participation.

Once a project is awarded, clear and enforceable timelines should govern each stage of development.

Power purchase and implementation agreements should be executed within three months of award, followed by financial closure within six months of PPA signing. Construction should then be completed within 12-18 months, depending on project size and site conditions.

Delays at any stage should trigger defined penalties, including encashment of performance guarantees.

Without disciplined timelines, projects risk remaining in prolonged development phases without progressing to construction.

Land and grid access remain two of the biggest barriers to scaling solar in Bangladesh.

Utility-scale solar is inherently land intensive: every 1,000 MWp of ground-mounted capacity typically requires roughly 2,200-2,300 acres. In a densely populated country, securing suitable sites becomes a major challenge. The 'solar park' model offers a practical solution.

Under this approach, government agencies prepare land and supporting infrastructure such as roads, drainage and substations before leasing plots to private developers.

By addressing land and grid constraints upfront, solar parks can significantly reduce development risk, lower costs and accelerate project timelines. Targeted fiscal incentives can help accelerate investment during the early stages of solar expansion.

Policies such as tax holidays, reduced or zero import duties on solar modules, inverters and key balance-of-system components and accelerated depreciation for renewable energy assets can significantly lower capital costs.

Because much solar equipment is imported, such measures can materially improve project economics and support more competitive tariffs. Rooftop solar offers a fast-track pathway for expansion. Approximately 6,000 square metres of roof space can support around 1 MWp of solar capacity.

Large factory rooftops provide suitable space for distributed generation, while net metering and third-party PPAs can enable deployment without upfront investment.

As solar capacity grows, complementary technologies such as battery storage will help manage intermittency and support grid stability.

Bangladesh has both the demand and the opportunity to scale solar power rapidly. The challenge now is execution.

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India central bank holds rates, assesses war

AFP, Mumbai

India's central bank left interest rates unchanged on Wednesday as it assessed the fallout of the Middle East war on the world's fastest-growing major economy.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said the benchmark repurchase rate, the level at which it lends to commercial banks, would remain at 5.25 percent after a unanimous vote by a six-member panel.

A majority of analysts had forecast a pause, given that the bank reduced rates by a cumulative 125 basis points over 2025, before stopping in February.

But some experts had not ruled out a surprise move. Since beginning on February 28, the Iran war has battered India's rupee, raised inflation risks and clouded New Delhi's economic growth outlook.

But a two-week ceasefire announced by US President Donald Trump on Tuesday, and a temporary re-opening of the critical Strait of Hormuz, may help reduce fuel pressures and ease cooking gas shortages in the world's most populous nation.

RBI governor Sanjay Malhotra said the monetary policy committee acknowledged risks to India's inflation outlook but added that the economy's fundamentals gave it "greater resilience to withstand shocks now than in the past".

"It felt, therefore, prudent to wait and watch the changing circumstances and the evolving growth-inflation outlook," Malhotra said in a televised address from Mumbai. India, which depends on the Middle East for a significant chunk of its oil and liquefied petroleum gas needs, was one of the "most vulnerable economies within Asia to an energy price shock", according to analysts at Nomura.

Solar push helps Pakistan temper Gulf energy shock

AFP, Lahore

Pakistan's solar power push has cushioned the full impact of the war in the Middle East, analysts said, despite lingering concerns over fuel supplies and rising prices.

A study published last month assessed that the uptake of solar around 2018 helped the country avoid more than \$12 billion in oil and gas imports up to February this year.

At projected market prices, it could save a further \$6.3 billion by the end of 2026, said Renewables First and the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air.

In the bustling side streets of Lahore, in northeast Pakistan, shopkeeper Aftab Ahmed, 49, was out shopping for solar panels to install at home to help him cut costs.

"The current fuel situation in our country is such that fuel has gone beyond the reach of the common person," he told AFP last Friday.

"It has become so expensive that an average person can no longer afford fuel for a motorcycle or a car. Fuel prices are also affecting electricity bills, leading to further increases.

"If we shift towards solar energy, at

least some savings can be achieved from one side."

Hours earlier, the government in Islamabad announced an eye-watering 42.7-percent hike in the price of petrol and 54.9 percent on diesel.

That brought protesters onto the

streets, sparked queues at fuel stations, and led the government to announce free state-run public transport for a month.

BOOM

Rooftop solar panels are everywhere in Pakistan, helping to provide uninterrupted power and avoid often

lengthy cuts in grid supply, particularly when temperatures soar.

Nabiya Imran, an energy analyst with Renewables First in the capital Islamabad, said they have also helped ease the burden caused by the disruption to shipping in the Gulf.

"Because people in Pakistan have adopted solar over the past several years, this... is providing a cushioning effect against the crisis in the Strait of Hormuz, particularly in the power sector," she said. "Had we not adopted solar in the first place to the extent that we have, the impacts in the power sector would be much worse."

Pakistan's solar surge does not mean it is immune to the supply shortages that have hit countries across Asia.

Last month, the government introduced austerity measures. The working week for public sector employees was cut to four days and schools were shut.

The Pakistan Super League cricket tournament was also cut from six venues to two, and crowds were banned, to save fuel.

But solar has made working from home more viable and affordable for Pakistanis because it cuts reliance on the grid and imported gas.



PHOTO: REUTERS/FILE

Men load solar panels on a rickshaw at a market in Karachi. Rooftop solar panels are everywhere in Pakistan, helping to provide uninterrupted power and avoid often lengthy cuts in grid supply, particularly when temperatures soar.