

The Daily Star

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Fuel crisis, unequal cuts worsen power situation

Govt must make genuine efforts to ensure fair electricity distribution

Bangladesh is in the grip of a severe power crisis that is leaving millions of people without electricity for hours, especially in rural areas. Shortfalls are widening rapidly. On Tuesday evening, the gap between generation and demand stood at 1,923MW—already punishing. By Wednesday evening, this gap widened to 2,180MW. The government itself now concedes the shortfall could hit 3,000MW.

The power crisis is, in equal measure, a fuel problem. Currently, 71 of the country's 143 power plants are either completely idle or operating well below capacity, constrained by shortages of gas, coal, and furnace oil. To meet peak summer demand, the Bangladesh Power Development Board requires 1,200 million cubic feet of gas daily, yet it is receiving only about 870 million. However, domestic fuel scarcity only explains part of the problem. Internal data from April 22 reveals that India's Adani Power, our largest single source of imported electricity, shut down the second unit of its cross-border plant for maintenance. This slashed Adani's supply by half, down to 748MW. Because Bangladesh relies on these twin units for roughly 10 percent of its daily electricity, the reduction has been a major blow to an already strained grid. The Power Division confirmed yesterday that the offline unit is expected to resume operations by April 26.

Beyond the generation deficit, the distribution of available electricity is highly unequal. Current data shows rural communities are enduring five to six hours of blackouts daily, while major cities remain largely unaffected. Loadshedding is actively managed to protect high-demand commercial and metropolitan areas, forcing rural grids to absorb the brunt of the outages. This inequity is compounded by a lack of transparent reporting. The national grid's official shortfall figures contradict the data shared by the Bangladesh Rural Electrification Board. Officials have admitted that national statistics often measure how much electricity can be generated in a given hour, rather than actual consumer demand. Such reporting is a statistical sleight of hand that effectively masks the true scale of power outages outside city limits.

When authorities fail to acknowledge the reality on the ground, formulating an effective response becomes impossible. While the government recently formed a committee to examine these discrepancies, the fact that basic measurement flaws persist in 2026 is a major institutional failure. Over the past decade, Bangladesh has invested heavily in expanding its grid. But infrastructure reaching every village means little if it leaves rural residents in the dark for half the day.

To stabilise the grid and ensure fairness, three systemic issues must be addressed. First, the government must implement an honest and accurate reporting system that tracks where electricity is actually distributed and records the true duration of outages across all regions. Second, authorities need a revised load management protocol that fairly shares the burden of power cuts between urban and rural consumers. Finally, Bangladesh must develop a robust, long-term fuel supply strategy that reduces dependence on volatile global LNG markets and mitigates the risks of relying heavily on cross-border energy imports.

First light of justice, at last

Tonu murder case must not get stalled again

After a decade's wait and countless calls for justice, we are heartened to see the case for Sohagi Jahan Tonu's murder finally picking up pace. On Tuesday, a retired senior warrant officer of Bangladesh Army, Hafizur Rahman, was arrested from his home. The following day, he was placed on a three-day remand by Cumilla Sadar Cognisance Court-1 after being produced there by the Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI). Earlier on April 6, the same court ordered the cross-matching of the DNA profiles of three retired army personnel (including Hafizur) against evidence collected in 2016. What makes this case unique is not just the brutality of the crime—Tonu's body was found dumped in bushes; she had been raped, and her hair had been chopped off with scissors—but also the unexplainably long road to justice that the victim's family is still having to tread.

To date, the case has had 80 hearing dates, with six investigation officers from four agencies handling the probe over the years. When contacted recently by *Prothom Alo*, Inspector Mojibur Rahman, who was the investigation officer of the case for four years under CID Cumilla, said they had already been aware of the three suspects now known by name, but matching DNA samples had not been possible at the time "for various reasons." The fact that the DNA evidence was there and that the suspects were known for years, and yet the investigation did not move forward at all, is unacceptable. And when an officer provides such dubious reasons behind justice being delayed for a decade, the logical conclusion to draw is that there were factors and quarters actively preventing the case from making progress.

Since 2016, this case has been surrounded by mystery, which we now know was manufactured. What has prevented the case from going to trial was the need to preserve the impunity that certain defence forces were used to enjoying. Now that progress is finally being made, does it mean that the influence of these quarters no longer exists? Can we rest assured that these influences will not show up again to further stall the case?

We urge that the DNA samples be tested without delay and that utmost procedural transparency be maintained going forward. The trial process must also be initiated promptly and be free of influence. Tonu's family deserves to receive justice for the heinous crimes committed against their daughter. All relevant authorities must do their best to achieve this outcome.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Rana Plaza collapses

On this day in 2013, Rana Plaza collapsed in Savar, killing some 1,136 people, after large structural cracks were discovered in the building a day before.

35TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DAILY STAR

When independent newspapers burn, so does democracy

Without free media, we will lose our direction again



THE THIRD VIEW

Mahfuz Anam
is the editor and publisher of The Daily Star.

MAHFUZ ANAM

When independent, objective and fact-based newspapers are set on fire, it is democracy that burns. It is the diversity of views, the culture of dissent, and the right to protest that are set on fire. The need for debate, the practice of argument and counterargument in search of truth, and the ability to look at the same thing from different angles and perspectives are what get destroyed. From creative thinkers, we turn into obedient servants.

This was the real intention—destroying democracy—when *The Daily Star* and *Prothom Alo*, two leading newspapers that truly strengthened and institutionalised independent journalism in Bangladesh, were set on fire on the night of December 18, 2025.

Yes, the very institutions that held all governments to account, relentlessly criticised those in power for their repressive and corrupt measures, and fought against more than 15 years of Sheikh Hasina's rule; whose editors were prosecuted, one charged in 84 cases and the other charged with murder; whose reporters were not allowed to attend the prime minister's events and press conferences after 2014; who suffered forced curtailment of government and private advertisements; who endured attempts to change ownership, and were denigrated and called "enemies" of Bangladesh on the floor of parliament.

These are the two papers that stood up against enforced disappearances, custodial deaths, police brutalities, and other violations of human rights. We have always stood for democracy, the rights of opposition, and culture of dissent, and have relentlessly criticised any assault on human rights. It is these two papers that fought most spiritedly against the Digital Security Act and all other attempts to muzzle the press and suppress public opinion.

And these newspapers were set on fire with the hope that they would be reduced to ashes. Instead, we resurfaced with one single word: Unbowed.

The people captured in videos of the fire incident do not appear to be newspaper readers. So, how can

people who don't read us nurture so much hatred that they would take the law into their own hands, break the fundamental norms that govern a society, and commit criminal acts to burn down two of the most well-read and well-respected newspapers? The more one examines that night's events, the more undeniable it becomes that these were pre-planned and meticulously organised. The planners were waiting for an "appropriate" moment to execute it.



In the wee hours between December 18 and 19 last year, an unruly crowd set *The Daily Star* office on fire with journalists and other staff still inside the building, an attack not just against a single media house but the spirit of independent journalism.

FILE PHOTO: ABDUL GONI

That moment came when the young and popular leader Osman Hadi was murdered.

Who were these people? Who indoctrinated them, instigated them, and finally set them out to burn us down?

What surprised us was the role played by members of the interim government. All of them knew us well. Some were columnists of these very papers, and others had written for us at one time or another. They knew us and were well-versed in our editorial policies. Many even sought our help in carrying out their programmes.

Where were their voices of protest, especially following December 18? They were well-aware of the social

media vilification, and knew that the accusations being brought against us were completely false. Yet, they did nothing to protect the newspapers that had helped them and carried their columns, often angering the power of the day for doing so. They did nothing to prevent the destruction.

Most disappointing was the role of the then government as a whole. We still cannot reconcile ourselves to the fact that law enforcers did not prevent the arson attacks, especially when one newspaper was set on fire and the mob was publicly announcing that it would attack the other. The time gap between the two fires was about 40 minutes. Surely, something could have been done.

What is the story of *The Daily Star*'s 35 years of "journalism without fear or favour"? This is what we pledged to our readers in our first editorial: "... the strength of *The Daily Star* lies

to strengthen democracy, ensure fundamental rights, fight corruption, and promote good governance. We devoted ourselves to people's rights, press freedom, the right to dissent, and took a strong stand against all repressive laws. We always emphasised strengthening parliament as a "House of the people," and not an extension of the executive branch. We worked tirelessly to institutionalise democracy by advocating for an independent judiciary, a powerful election commission, and depoliticisation of the bureaucracy, law enforcement and administration.

There is one distinct area where our hearts fill with pride: our focus on the environment. We ran countless reports and photo features on river encroachment, groundwater preservation, forest conservation, and air and noise pollution. We held hundreds of roundtables and seminars on women's issues, child rights, human rights, the right to information, and the right to protest and dissent. Ours was among the strongest voices condemning all forms of repressive laws.

The July uprising came as a beacon of freedom, and it is towards freedom that we must march. Burning newspapers will not take us there. The uprising's main theme was "anti-discrimination." We want to make it *The Daily Star*'s main focus. The rich-poor gap has widened to a cruel and inhuman level. The AI revolution will further marginalise the poor unless we use this transformative technology for the opposite purpose. In universalising education, spreading skills, providing basic healthcare, and ensuring agricultural productivity and renewable energy, AI has tremendous potential to transform our society in ways that may seem like a fantasy at the moment. We must transform our thinking and recognise our population as our greatest asset. Each skilled individual with higher productivity can help turn Bangladesh into a prosperous country. AI can help us do that.

For that, we need to change our mindset—from seeing the poor as a liability to recognising them as an asset. We need to turn 180 degrees in our policy priorities.

It is in this technology-based and human resource-focused direction that *The Daily Star* feels convinced that our future lies, along with, of course, democracy and a free press. We have a new government and a leadership that is fresh and young. Will they show the innovation, courage, and determination that history has given them a rare opportunity to demonstrate?

Climate change demands a smarter approach to healthcare

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On a hot, humid morning in the coastal village of Satkhira, Rahima Begum wades through waist-deep saline water to reach the nearest health facility. She is unsure if it is still functioning after the recent cyclone. Behind her, she drags a makeshift wooden raft carrying her seven-year-old daughter, severely ill with diarrhoea and dehydration. Rahima's village has long been on the frontline of climate change consequences.

Over the years, salinity intrusion in groundwater has reduced access to fresh water. Tubewells, once a lifeline, no longer act as reliable sources of safe drinking water. Daily exposure to saline water for washing, cooking, and drinking is increasing the risk of diarrhoeal diseases, skin infections, menstrual and reproductive health complications, as well as cardiometabolic diseases. For Rahima, and millions like her, climate change is no longer a distant threat but an everyday reality. It is reshaping disease patterns, increasing the occurrence of acute public health events, and straining access to essential health

services.

Across Bangladesh, climate-sensitive health risks are intensifying. Heatwaves are becoming more frequent and severe which heightens risks of heat stress, dehydration, and mortality. Dengue, once seasonal and largely confined to urban areas, has become a year-round, nationwide threat. In 2023 alone, Bangladesh recorded over 3,21,000 cases and 1,705 deaths from the disease which is the deadliest outbreak on record.

Waterborne diseases, including diarrhoeal illnesses, often surge after floods, and they remain a major contributor to mortality among children under five. Ambient air pollution continues to exacerbate respiratory diseases, contributing to a considerable number of premature deaths every year. These converging risks underscore the importance of a systemic, forward-looking response in protecting health in a changing climate.

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare's new Health National Adaptation Plan (HNAP) provides a critical framework to do just that. Developed with support from the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the plan sets out a clear roadmap to build climate-resilient, low-carbon health systems in alignment with the country's commitments under COP26. It defines priorities across infrastructure, surveillance,

workforce capacity, and governance. Crucially, it marks a decisive shift from a reactive approach to one grounded in preparedness, resilience, and long-term sustainability.

The priority now is implementation. Health facilities must withstand floods, heatwaves and cyclones while maintaining essential services, including safe water, sanitation and reliable energy. Disease surveillance must integrate climate data to improve early warning and rapid response, particularly for climate-sensitive threats such as dengue. The health workforce must be equipped to recognise and manage emerging risks, from heat-related illness to shifting patterns of infectious disease. Groups who are being disproportionately affected—women, adolescent girls, children, older persons, and persons with disabilities—must be prioritised in both planning and implementation. The health sector itself must reduce its environmental footprint. Improving energy efficiency, expanding renewable energy use, and adopting sustainable procurement practices can lower emissions while strengthening system reliability. Climate resilience and sustainability are not competing priorities but mutually reinforcing.

Stronger domestic investment must be matched by more accessible and predictable international climate finance, aligned with country priorities. Only through sustained funding and effective partnerships can

the HNAP be translated into tangible health gains for communities like Rahima's, which are on the frontlines of climate change. Cross-sectoral action is likewise critical. Addressing climate-related health risks requires coordinated efforts across water and sanitation, agriculture, environment, infrastructure, urban planning, and disaster management. Empowering local governments and communities is essential in delivering practical, context-specific solutions, while stronger coordination, combined with locally driven action, may help to build resilience while delivering broader health and development gains, with equity at the centre.

The conversation must shift from commitment to implementation and from planning to protection. Success will be measured in lives protected: fewer disease outbreaks, reduced heat-related deaths, and declines in maternal, neonatal, and child mortality. Success will also be measured in the ability of health systems to withstand and continue delivering care in the face of repeated climate shocks. For communities like Rahima's, resilience cannot remain an aspiration, it must become a reality. The HNAP provides a clear path forward, but its impact will depend on how quickly and effectively it is implemented. In a changing climate, protecting health will ultimately be defined not by plans alone, but by the actions taken today.