

Ensure justice for Rana Plaza victims

Rehabilitate, compensate the survivors properly

It is deeply frustrating that 13 years after the Rana Plaza tragedy, justice remains elusive for the victims and survivors. Reportedly, both key cases linked to the disaster continue to stall, largely due to the prosecution's failure to produce witnesses. At the same time, those affected by the incident and their families are still struggling for basic compensation and dignified living conditions. The authorities must explain why, after all this time, these basic requirements of justice and support remain unmet.

The collapse of the nine-storey building in Savar on April 24, 2013 killed more than 1,100 people and injured over 2,500, most of them garment workers. It remains the deadliest disaster in the history of the country's RMG sector. Multiple cases have been filed against those responsible, but progress has been painfully slow. According to the Bangladesh Legal Aid Services Trust, no case has reached a final verdict, and full legal remedies, including compensation in accordance with international standards, have yet to be secured.

In the murder case involving 41 accused, including building owner Sohel Rana, only 145 out of 594 witnesses have testified since the trial began in 2016. That leaves a staggering 449 witnesses still unheard. The building code violation case has fared even worse, with not a single witness testifying so far. Such prolonged delays are eroding public trust in the justice system and reinforcing a culture of impunity. For the victims and survivors, this is nothing short of a betrayal. Till today, thousands of the injured RMG workers continue to live in hardship, without adequate compensation, medical care or rehabilitation. Many are permanently disabled, unable to return to work, and struggling to meet even basic needs. Even when compensation has been provided, it has been insufficient to ensure a dignified life or long-term security for the survivors.

This is unacceptable. With a new elected government now in power, we think there is an opportunity to change the course. First, the government must ensure that the stalled trials are expedited by holding law enforcement accountable for producing witnesses and by prioritising these cases. Second, a comprehensive compensation and rehabilitation system must be implemented without further delay, including long-term medical care, income support, and employment opportunities for those affected. Third, compensation must be aligned with international labour standards.

Beyond Rana Plaza, there must be a renewed commitment to workplace safety across the industrial sector. This includes stricter enforcement of building codes, regular inspections, and meaningful penalties for violations. Workers must be empowered to voice safety concerns without fear, and regulatory bodies must be strengthened to act swiftly and independently. The country's economic progress has been built on the back of these workers. Ensuring justice, dignity, and safety for them is a responsibility that should no longer be ignored.

Make hiring at BMU facility transparent

Plan to resume recruitment for super-specialised hospital a positive move

We commend the recently appointed Bangladesh Medical University (BMU) Vice-Chancellor Dr FM Siddiqui for committing to fully operationalise the university's super-specialised facility within six months. The 750-bed hospital, built at the cost of Tk 1,868 crore in 2022, has almost turned into a white elephant. The world-class facility, capable of providing stem cell therapy, gene therapy, and robotic operations, sits idle due to a manpower shortage, while the government continues to pay back the Tk 1,047 crore loan taken from South Korea to complete the project. In this context, the VC's announcement to recruit specialised doctors at competitive salaries for the hospital appears hopeful.

The facility requires over 1,000 personnel, including doctors, nurses, medical technicians, and support staff. By June 7, 2023, it recruited only 250 people. Due to allegations of corruption, the recruitment process was halted during the Awami League's tenure. According to a 2024 New Age report, 157 hospital employees were sent to South Korea for training for two to four months using hospital funds, but a majority of the doctors and other medical professionals did not report back after completing their training. Several probe committees were formed as a result. During the interim government, the recruitment of 544 doctors, nurses, and other medical staff was scrapped as the committees found evidence of irregularities. Such a past allows only tempered optimism about the future hiring process.

Thus, we urge the BMU VC to ensure that the recruitment process at the super-specialised hospital remains transparent from the very beginning. Nepotism or partisanship must be avoided at all costs. Anticipating that offering the specialised doctors salaries higher than the existing government pay scale may elicit ire in other public hospitals, the VC must handle this issue carefully. However, the focus should not just be on doctor recruitment. If the specialised facility is to provide healthcare services to 5,000 patients daily, as originally envisioned, it must also ensure international standards in the quality of support provided by the hospital's nurses and other medical staff. Properly trained technicians are also required to operate and maintain the state-of-the-art medical equipment at this hospital.

While it remains to be seen whether this facility will actually begin providing the envisioned care in the next six months, one issue we urge the government to avoid is building healthcare facilities without a fully approved operational plan, including staffing, budgeting, and management frameworks. A country under fiscal strain cannot afford white elephants in its healthcare sector.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Massive earthquake rocks Nepal

On this day in 2015, a 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck near Kathmandu in Nepal, killing about 9,000 people. More than 600,000 structures in Kathmandu and nearby towns were damaged or destroyed.



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Bangladesh's power shortage has increased recently, placing additional strain on an already stretched national grid. The Power Division revealed that Thursday's peak demand stood at 17,000MW, while generation was estimated to reach only 14,000MW, leaving a shortfall of around 3,000MW. The day earlier, a deficit of over 2,000MW translated directly into load-shedding.

The reasons are well-rehearsed by now: rising summer heat, gas shortages, coal constraints, higher import costs of fuel, and pressure on foreign exchange reserves. At present, 71 of the country's 143 power plants are either idle or operating below capacity due to shortages of gas, coal, and furnace oil. To meet peak summer demand, the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) requires about 1,200 million cubic feet of gas daily, but is receiving only around 870 million. This structural fuel gap alone explains a large share of reduced output.

Domestic constraints, however, are not the only pressure point. Internal data from Wednesday shows that India's Adani Power, currently Bangladesh's largest single source of imported electricity, temporarily reduced supply after one unit of its cross-border plant went offline for maintenance, cutting output by half to around 750MW. Since Bangladesh relies on these units for about 10 percent of daily electricity, even temporary disruptions deepen the crisis. The Power Division expects some easing from late April to early May with the phased return of generation units, including Adani as well as plants like Chattogram's SS Power and Patuakhali's RNPL.

But what is unfolding alongside this familiar energy stress is something more structurally revealing. The national figures, taken alone, suggest a system under pressure but still broadly functioning. But the experience of that shortage changes sharply once it moves from the grid to geography. Urban centres, particularly Dhaka, continue to receive relatively stable supply with shorter outages, even though State Minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Anindya Islam Amit said on Thursday that the government had decided to trial around 110MW of load-shedding in the capital.

District towns and rural areas face longer and more frequent interruptions, often stretching into hours. In Rajshahi, Rangpur, Barishal, and Sylhet's peripheral upazilas, rural outages now routinely stretch from 8-13 hours a day. Half-day shortages are becoming increasingly normal in some areas. Even within the same administrative regions, urban centres tend to remain relatively stable while the surrounding unions bear the heavier burden. A similar imbalance is visible in industrial zones: Gazipur and Narayanganj, for example, are prioritised to keep production running, whereas nearby rural belts absorb longer cuts.



Urban centres in Bangladesh, particularly Dhaka, continue to receive relatively stable electricity supply with shorter outages, while district towns and rural areas face longer and more frequent interruptions, often spanning hours.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

This is where the logic of "load management" reveals its deeper mechanism. Officially, it is framed as a technical necessity: protecting critical infrastructure, sustaining industrial output, and preventing grid instability. That rationale holds in operational terms. But in practice, it also becomes the channel through which scarcity is organised. Once prioritisation is introduced, it tends to stabilise into a pattern. Over time, the power distribution begins to reflect not just technical need but accumulated hierarchy.

In rural and semi-urban areas, this hierarchy is experienced through fractured daily life. Irrigation schedules collapse into uncertainty, directly affecting crop cycles, while rising

diesel dependency adds to the financial pressure. Water systems dependent on electric pumps become unreliable. Small industries and informal economic sectors face similar strain. Larger industrial clusters continue production but at higher operational costs and reduced efficiency, while smaller units absorb disproportionate losses.

There is also a quieter but increasingly visible cost in education. Students preparing for public examinations, particularly SSC candidates at present, deal with disrupted study environments during peak heat. Study hours are repeatedly broken, concentration becomes difficult, and preparation itself turns inconsistent.

And then, alongside uneven supply, another pressure is emerging on the consumption side. There is growing concern that electricity prices may rise further as generation costs increase and subsidy pressures intensify. This adds a second layer to the crisis: besides unreliable access, households face a rising financial burden. Crucially, this cost pressure is also uneven: those

Board (BREB) figures at times show significantly higher shortages than BPDB estimates for the same period, seemingly reflecting different calculation methods. Officials note that demand is often inferred rather than directly measured, while generation is shaped by fuel availability. Even within institutions, there is no fully aligned picture of the shortage being managed.

At the root of this imbalance is a fragile energy structure. Installed capacity remains high on paper, but a significant share is constrained by fuel dependency and operational limits. Gas fluctuations, imported coal logistics, furnace oil costs, and the pressure of payment to independent power producers all reduce effective generation. When fuel is tight, output falls unevenly, and shortages are managed through spatial prioritisation rather than uniform rationing.

Recent patterns also show that effective generation consistently falls short of installed capacity, as fuel constraints and operational limits keep a significant share of plants either underutilised or intermittently offline during peak demand. Capacity exists on paper, but its availability is variable and uneven, depending on fuel access, plant condition, and system-level prioritisation.

What is emerging eventually is a different kind of power discrimination, embedded in the management of scarcity itself, normalised through repetition until it appears inevitable.

And that is precisely where the conversation now needs to shift. Because if electricity has become a determinant of opportunity, productivity, and even basic dignity during extreme heat, its distribution cannot remain an administrative afterthought. The widening gap between urban continuity and rural disruption is no longer a seasonal inconvenience; it is a structural outcome that demands correction.

This requires more than short-term balancing during peak demand. It demands transparency in how load-shedding is allocated, alignment between reported data and distribution-level reality, and a serious rethink of whether critical services are being defined too narrowly around geography rather than need. It also requires investment choices that reduce over-centralisation, so that resilience is not concentrated in one part of the country while fragility is exported to another.

The heat will continue to rise, so may demand. Whether the burden of that rise continues to fall unevenly is not a natural outcome but a governed one. And anything that is governed can be redesigned.

PMO needs a policy and programme coordination cell



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In Bangladesh, big policy ideas have never been in short supply. With the new government, we have been hearing announcements like modern transport systems for Dhaka, renewed efforts to recover the city's canals, and new social protection tools like the Farmer Card and Family Card. These initiatives carry the promise of a state that works efficiently and serves citizens fairly. But anyone who has watched public policy in Bangladesh long enough also knows that there is a gap between policy announcement and policy delivery.

A transport project, for example, involves several ministries and agencies. Canal recovery requires city corporations, water authorities, land offices, and enforcement bodies to coordinate closely. Social protection programmes depend on digital databases from different institutions. In theory, this coordination should be routine work. However, in practice, that is not always the case. One ministry waits for another and files move slowly across departments. Responsibilities overlap and small delays accumulate. Eventually, the promising project begins to lose momentum, resulting in loss of public confidence.

Governments around the world face the same challenge. Designing a good policy is only half the job. Ensuring that it is implemented properly, on

time and across institutions, is an entirely different task. Over the past two decades, many countries have tried to solve this problem by creating small coordination teams at the centre of the government, usually inside the prime minister's office. These teams do not run ministries nor replace bureaucrats. They focus on making sure important policies are actually moving forward. Their job is to track priority programmes, monitor progress, and ask a few straightforward questions. Is the policy being implemented? Are results visible? If not, what is blocking progress?

The UK government in 2001 created the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit to track progress in areas like education, health, and policing. Its role was not to design policies, but to make sure they were delivered. When progress slowed, the unit tried to identify why and pushed institutions to resolve the problem. Malaysia also introduced a similar system with its Performance Management and Delivery Unit (PEMANDU) in 2009. Working inside the prime minister's department, PEMANDU was created to help ministries focus on clear national targets and closely monitor progress. When obstacles appeared, the unit brought agencies together to resolve them. The approach helped speed up

improvements in areas such as public services and crime reduction. Singapore has taken coordination even further. Inside the prime minister's office, specialised teams oversee national strategy and digital governance across ministries. Their systems track government programmes in real time and ensure that agencies operate less like separate islands and more like parts of a single system.

For Bangladesh, the relevance of this approach is becoming increasingly clear. Urban transport reform is not just an engineering project; it involves land authorities, city planners, transport regulators, financial institutions, and environmental agencies. Without strong coordination, even a well-designed project can drift into years of delay. The same challenge will appear in efforts to recover Dhaka's canals which are essential for the city's flood control, environmental protection, and long-term sustainability. Its implementation requires coordinated efforts, contributions, and approvals from multitude of different government ministries, agencies, and organisations. Initiatives like the Farmer Card and Family Card are aiming to distribute subsidies and essential goods more efficiently. These initiatives depend heavily on systems like agriculture databases, social safety net registries, and distribution networks, and a multitude of different ministries. If those systems do not communicate smoothly, the programmes will quickly become less effective.

Establishing a policy and programme coordination cell under the Prime Minister's Office is worth serious consideration to keep major national programmes aligned and moving forward. The cell could track progress

on priority initiatives and highlight problems early and when bottlenecks appear—whether regulatory delays, land disputes, or inter-agency disagreements—it could bring the relevant institutions together to resolve them quickly. A coordination cell could also help policymakers see the bigger picture. Real-time dashboards tracking major initiatives could show where progress is being made and where attention is needed. Another useful role would be bringing outside expertise into the policy process.

Many of today's challenges including energy transition, digital infrastructure, export diversification, extend beyond traditional administrative knowledge. Convening task forces of industry leaders, researchers, and practitioners could provide practical insights from people working directly in these sectors. Such groups could help identify obstacles early and suggest solutions grounded in real-world experience. This kind of coordination has become even more important for us as Bangladesh approaches a major milestone in graduating from least developed country status. Economic diversification, energy security, digital transformation, and urban infrastructure all depend on multiple parts of government working together.

We often forget that Bangladesh has already demonstrated remarkable ambition in its development journey. The next phase may depend less on announcing new policies and more on ensuring that the ones already announced actually reach the people they are meant to serve. Because in modern governance, success is not measured by how many programmes are launched but by how many are delivered.