

A worrying delay in the justice process

July uprising cases in limbo as probes progress at a snail's pace

It is deeply frustrating that nearly 21 months after the tragic events of the July uprising, investigations into most of the cases filed over the killings and violence at the time are still dragging on. According to a report by this daily, of the 1,855 cases filed, police have so far completed investigations into only 176. That means a staggering 90 percent of the cases are still stuck in the investigation phase. Officials at the Police Headquarters blame this sloth-like pace in the probe on the huge lists of accused in these cases, including "unnamed" suspects, which make the process more complicated, not to mention time-consuming.

One may recall the case-filing frenzy after the uprising that ousted the autocratic regime of the Awami League on August 5, 2024. On many occasions, media reports highlighted the dubious nature of many of the cases, with people with little to no connection with the events of July uprising getting charged with murder, attempted murder, and violence. Some were made accused simply because of their political affiliations or leanings, while others were victims of personal vendettas. This daily also reported on cases where the scenes of alleged crimes and the locations of the accused did not match.

As a result, the survivors and families of the victims seeking justice have been stuck in a prolonged wait. Meanwhile, wrongly accused individuals have been forced into a legal quagmire, enduring mental duress and financial losses. Many of them have been detained and remain in jail without bail, already being subjected to punishment without even facing trial. What's worse, the complainants of many cases have been reported to demand money from the accused with the promise of dropping their names or withdrawing the cases, a trend flagged by the police themselves. Not only is this a gross disservice to justice seekers, but it's also a blatant violation of people's right to legal protection and fair trial.

This state of affairs must not continue any longer. While we recognise the complicated nature of the July uprising cases, police investigations must pick up speed while ensuring due diligence. To this end, we suggest forming a special task force dedicated to disposing of the July uprising cases. They will be responsible for scrutinising the relevant details to separate genuine cases from the dubious ones so that the judicial process becomes smoother and less time-consuming.

The prevailing fiasco has again brought to light how weak and vulnerable to abuse our criminal justice system is. It needs a complete overhaul to plug in the loopholes that allow people to file cases without reasonable cause, make "unnamed" individuals accused in a case, and enlist a large number of people as suspects in a single case. Doing any of these creates unnecessary hassle for the law enforcement agencies as well as those who are wrongly accused, while obstructing the course of justice. A modern criminal justice system must not allow legal procedures based on flimsy accusations or prolonged pre-trial detentions without reasonable cause.

Remove ageing buses from roads

The new government must address transport sector anomalies

It is deeply frustrating that despite changes in political leadership over the past one and a half decades, Dhaka's ageing and unfit buses continue to operate on the roads with little interruption. According to the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), around 30 percent of the buses and minibuses currently operating in the capital are more than 20 years old. This far exceeds their economic and operational lifespan. These vehicles are often modified with additional seats to maximise revenue, even as their mechanical condition deteriorates, raising serious concerns about passenger safety, comfort and environmental impact. They are also a frequent cause of road crashes and are highly fuel-inefficient.

Since 2010, successive governments have announced initiatives to remove unfit and outdated vehicles from Dhaka's roads. However, these efforts have repeatedly stalled due to weak enforcement, lack of political will, and consistent resistance from transport owners' and workers' associations. Following the political transition after August 2024, leadership in transport associations shifted from Awami League-affiliated figures to BNP-linked leaders. Sadly, this change in control has not translated into any meaningful improvement in the transport sector. After taking office, the interim government set a six-month deadline to remove old vehicles and promised support for new purchases, but no action followed.

Reportedly, Dhaka has around 7,000 approved buses operated by roughly 300 companies and at least 4,000 owners, but many run without valid fitness certificates or route permits. To avoid police action, owners often attach their vehicles to companies linked to influential figures. As a result, much of the system functions informally, with widespread disregard for transport regulations. Transport experts say this disorder enables large-scale informal earnings and extortion across multiple layers of the system. A Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) study published in March 2024 found that approximately Tk 1,059 crore is collected annually in extortion from privately owned buses. In such a context, any move towards order and regulation directly threatens established financial interests, thereby generating resistance to reform. This cycle must be broken.

To end the persistent anarchy in the transport sector, the new government must take urgent and effective measures. A comprehensive bus route rationalisation or franchise-based system should be introduced to bring operations under regulated, accountable frameworks. At the same time, strict enforcement of fitness standards, a phased but time-bound removal of expired buses, and transparent financing mechanisms for fleet replacement must be ensured. Replacing old and inefficient buses with modern vehicles would significantly improve urban air quality, reduce transport energy demand, and save fuel and foreign exchange at a time of energy crisis.

What fuel loading at Rooppur means for our energy future



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The fuel loading process at the first unit of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant project is scheduled to commence today, April 28, in the presence of high-level representatives from Bangladesh, Russia, and the International Atomic Energy Agency. This marks a major technological milestone for Bangladesh, as fuel loading is one of the most critical and complex stages in a power plant's operational phase, signalling the transition from construction to commissioning. On April 16, following the successful installation of hundreds of pieces of equipment and extensive non-nuclear testing at Unit-1, the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Regulatory Authority (BAERA) granted the licence required for fuel loading and pilot power generation, clearing the way for preparations.

The Rooppur project consists of two Russian-designed Generation III + VVER-1200 reactors, each with an electrical output capacity of 1,200 MWe (megawatts electrical). The project has been under construction since 2017, with technical assistance from Rosatom and financing of up to 90 percent through Russian state export credit. In the context of Bangladesh's growing energy demand, the project is poised to become a cornerstone of national energy security.

Loading fuel assemblies enriched with 3.5 percent uranium-235 into the reactor core is a highly specialised and technically demanding process. It signifies the beginning of nuclear operation. The fuel loading process is expected to take one to one-and-a-half months. After fuel loading, control rod adjustments for reactivity control, emergency core cooling systems, boric acid injection systems, turbine generator synchronisation tests, power evacuation processes, and other critical safety systems will be retested and verified before initiating a controlled fission reaction in the reactor core.

Once all the commissioning and verification activities are successfully carried out, the reactor will achieve its first "criticality," operating at just 1 percent of its approximately 3,200 MWth thermal power capacity. The plant's thermal efficiency is about 37 percent, meaning that roughly 37 percent of the reactor heat is converted into electricity. This stage represents the "birth" of the reactor. Testing

at such low thermal power ensures that any potential anomalies can be detected and managed immediately. Subsequently, the heat generated by the reactor will produce steam through steam generators to drive turbines and supply electricity to the national grid. Power generation will then be increased gradually to 5 percent, 10 percent, 15 percent, 30 percent, and beyond to verify system reliability, grid stability, and operational safety over an extended period.

This entire commissioning process, known as pilot operation, may take approximately 8 to 12 months. Successfully completing these stages is



'The Rooppur project is poised to become a cornerstone of national energy security.'

FILE PHOTO: AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU

one of the most complex parts of the reactor construction process. Once all international safety standards are met, BAERA will grant approval for commercial operation upon review of the Final Safety Analysis Report. When the Nuclear Power Plant Company Bangladesh Limited (NPCBL) begins operating the reactor at full capacity for electricity generation, it will mark a historic milestone for Bangladesh.

Once operational, a nuclear power plant serves as a baseload plant, running 24/7 unless interrupted by major technical issues or natural disasters. Approximately every 18 months, the reactor is shut down for six to eight weeks for refuelling, during which about 25 tonnes of spent fuel

are replaced with fresh uranium fuel. Outside of this maintenance period, the plant is expected to provide continuous power over an operational lifespan of about 60 years, with the possibility of a further 10-20 years of lifetime extension.

Given the high economic stakes of any downtime and the significantly higher costs of generating equivalent power from oil, LNG, or coal, maintaining uninterrupted operation is vital. This becomes even more important as Bangladesh faces a severe energy crisis. The global energy infrastructure and supply chains are currently under pressure due to the recent conflicts involving Iran, Israel, and the United States, alongside the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. The damage caused to energy facilities in Middle East, reductions in Russian gas exports to Europe, and sanctions on Iranian and Russian oil have destabilised global energy markets.

Consequently, many nations have been forced to implement fuel subsidies, rationing, and austerity

strengthen its energy security. Today, amid the US-Iran and Russia-Ukraine conflicts, the strategic importance of nuclear energy is once again gaining prominence. Furthermore, as the world increasingly moves away from fossil fuels to combat climate change, clean energy technologies are advancing rapidly. Alongside uranium-based fission and continued expansion of renewables, emerging technologies such as thorium-based reactors and deuterium-based fusion are expected to play important roles in the long-term global energy transition.

Beyond traditional large-scale plants, the industry is witnessing significant developments in modern reactors with enhanced safety features, including Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) and micro-reactors. These reactors are being developed by incorporating lessons learned from the Chernobyl and Fukushima accidents. With advanced safety systems, the probability of severe accidents is significantly reduced.

SMRs typically generate 300 MWe or less, while micro-reactors produce between 1 and 10 MWe. These modular units can be factory-built and deployed quickly, and their initial investment per unit is lower compared to large reactors. Their potential applications extend beyond electricity generation to green hydrogen production, desalination, and industrial heat supply. They are increasingly viewed as viable alternatives to coal- and oil-based plants and are well-suited for providing reliable power to remote islands, mining sites, military bases, research centres, and large data centres.

Countries such as the United States, Russia, and China are leading the advancement of these technologies. Under the current energy crisis, Germany, Italy, and some other EU member states are reportedly reconsidering the deployment of modern nuclear reactors. Technology giants such as Meta, Google, and Microsoft are also exploring micro-reactor deployment opportunities to help decarbonise the growing energy demands of their data centres.

In sum, to run the reactors in a safe and secure manner, the primary focus must be on fostering a rigorous safety culture in reactor operation and maintenance. At the same time, developing a highly skilled domestic workforce is essential to reducing foreign dependency and enhancing national technical expertise. Although the reactors are significantly behind the original schedule for grid connection, a successful completion of the Rooppur project remains vital. It will surely strengthen Bangladesh's energy security, financial stability, and national resilience.

A roadmap to boost foreign direct investment

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By improving the investment policy landscape, Bangladesh can attract more foreign direct investment (FDI) to catalyse the next wave of economic structural transformation, according to a key finding in the latest UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) report on the implementation of the Investment Policy Review (IPR).

While Bangladesh aspires to become a world-class manufacturing hub, the country's absolute and relative FDI performance continues to lag behind that of several regional peers, including Cambodia, Indonesia, and Vietnam, as well as averages for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)—regional groups Bangladesh aims to join.

The UNCTAD report shows that several important milestones were reached since the last IPR in 2013. These include, *inter alia*, the establishment of the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA), the creation and operationalisation of the Bangladesh Competition Commission,

the strengthening of the Public-Private Partnership Authority, and, more recently, the establishment of a multidisciplinary negotiators' pool who are contributing to the formulation of preferential trade and investment agreements. Moreover,

key regulatory and institutional reforms were implemented, including in labour, taxation, and intellectual property, as well as efforts to digitalise and rationalise investment facilitation platforms. The National Drug Policy was also updated to relax restrictions for foreign pharmaceutical manufacturers. Together, these reforms have contributed to improvements in the investment environment, against the backdrop of Bangladesh's transition from least developed country (LDC) status.

The IPR implementation report was prepared through a partnership between UNCTAD and UNDP under the Transformative Economic Policy Programme, with financial support from the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. The report notes that despite improvements, much remains to be done, describing reforms as a "work in progress." In particular, the legal and institutional framework for investment requires further strengthening, including the review and updating of the Foreign Private Investment (Promotion and Protection) Act of 1980. Institutional fragmentation in access to land, the need for more integrated infrastructure planning,

and capacity constraints in key institutions such as the Bangladesh Competition Commission are some of the major challenges.

FDI inflows to Bangladesh peaked at over \$1.8 billion in 2019, before declining in subsequent years amid macroeconomic pressures, foreign exchange constraints, global crises, and domestic political developments. By 2024, inflows were approximately one-third lower than 2019 levels. Preliminary data for the first three quarters of 2025, however, point to a rebound, supported mainly by reinvested earnings and intracompany loans. Despite recent volatility in flows, the inward FDI stock has remained broadly stable at around \$18 billion since 2021, reflecting the continued presence of foreign investors. Textile and garment, finance, and the power sector account for the largest shares of FDI stock, while investment is gradually diversifying towards sectors such as pharmaceuticals, telecommunications, and information and communication technologies, with the digital economy emerging as a promising frontier.

The current challenges faced by Bangladesh amid rapid changes in the global political and economic landscape call for greater engagement by both the government and the private sector to better leverage FDI as a source of development finance. The importance of FDI in this regard was underlined at the Fourth Global Conference on Financing for

Development (FID4) held in Spain's Seville last year. Cuts in official development assistance by traditional donors, a generalised slowdown in global FDI flows, and the gradual loss of preferential market access following LDC graduation underline the urgency for reforms to ensure that Bangladesh remains competitive in attracting higher levels of quality FDI aligned with strategic development objectives.

Looking ahead, the report emphasises the need for developing a national investment policy and a consolidated investment law to reinforce investor confidence and policy coherence. As Bangladesh approaches LDC graduation, proactive engagement with key investment and trading partners will be required to secure the best possible terms under ongoing negotiations of preferential trade and investment agreements. Priority sectors that can enhance competitiveness and diversification should be further nurtured, including pharmaceuticals and the digital economy. Continued reforms are also needed to address persistent bottlenecks to investment, notably in relation to access to land and infrastructure. UNCTAD and UNDP remain committed to continuing the engagement with key stakeholders in Bangladesh to support the implementation of these important reforms and to ensure that FDI contributes effectively to inclusive growth, decent jobs, and sustainable development.