

# Is US trade deal a backdoor for GMO dumping?



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Bangladesh signed the US Reciprocal Trade Agreement on February 9, 2026, just three days before the national election. Within two weeks, the US Supreme Court ruled that the tariff regime underpinning such agreements—imposed under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA)—violated federal law. The ruling represents a victory for the rule of law and the US constitutional framework. Immediately after that, Malaysia declared its agreement with the US “null and void,” establishing a precedent for sovereign reassessment of such deals.

The Bangladesh Interim Government, to avoid the reimposition of the reciprocal tariff rate (37 percent) proposed on April 2, 2025, on top of the usual most-favoured-nation (MFN) tariffs on certain or all Bangladeshi imports, signed the deal. Upon signing the “trade deal,” the US reduced the reciprocal tariff rate to 19 percent on Bangladesh’s originating goods. This was perceived as a “relief,” but at what cost?

## Meat, dairy imports are a blow to rural livelihood

The US trade deal is nothing but a dumping of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) through meat and dairy products. As the former adviser in the Ministry of Fisheries & Livestock (MOFL), I was aware of the possibility of imports of meat and dairy products. Obviously, we raised concerns that such imports would have a significant adverse impact on our livestock and poultry sectors and the livelihood of people.

Importing meat and dairy products from the US poses unequal trade terms for Bangladesh. The livestock and poultry sector in Bangladesh represents a fundamentally different economic model from that of the US. Here, livestock is embedded in a livelihood

economy, whereas in the US, it is part of an industrial agro-capitalist system. In the US, industrial livestock farming accounts for 21 lakh farms but engages less than two percent of the population. Contrarily, in Bangladesh, livestock keeping is part of the livelihoods of 80-85 percent of 4.1 crore households, often led by women. The meat and milk supply from these sources contributes two percent to the national GDP and 16 percent of agricultural GDP, and provides a significant proportion of animal protein for the 17.5 crore people. Over 83 percent of rural households own livestock (animals and poultry), 46 percent own bovine animals (cattle/buffalo), and 76.3 percent own poultry.

Bangladesh’s poor livestock keepers do not receive any subsidy, but will have to compete with a heavily subsidised industrial livestock sector. The US Department of Agriculture has spent at least \$72 billion in subsidies to livestock and seafood producers over the past few decades. This asymmetry is critical. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), smallholder livestock systems are highly vulnerable to import competition due to limited access to credit, technology, and state support.

This trade agreement with the US will allow agricultural and livestock products into the Bangladesh market as per Article 2.3, in which some issues are one-sided; for example: (1) Bangladesh will have to provide non-discriminatory or preferential market access to the US; (2) Bangladesh shall ensure that its sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures are science- and risk-based and do not operate as disguised restrictions on bilateral trade, and shall remove unjustified SPS barriers in areas that undermine reciprocity in agricultural goods; and (3) Bangladesh shall not enter into agreements or understandings with third countries that include non-

scientific, discriminatory, or preferential technical standards; include third country SPS measures that are incompatible with US or international standards; or otherwise disadvantage US exports to such third countries.

None of these is in favour of Bangladesh’s interests. It is an imposition to accept the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) unconditionally, despite having an

review, deregulation, additional labelling requirements, or approval from Bangladesh.

One simple demand from environmental and farmers’ organisations was that GMO products, whether produced in the country or imported, should be labelled. But this agreement removes such requirements and necessary regulatory measures. This agreement authorises the US to unload its genetically modified (GM) foods and other

have adapted to the widespread use of such chemicals and become resistant. These herbicide-tolerant weeds are an increasing problem. Widespread adoption of the chemicals has led to an accelerating increase in herbicide use and, consequently, an “arms race” in genetic engineering technology and the use of complementary herbicides. The increasing amount of herbicides sprayed not only causes substantial environmental problems but also creates new challenges for the risk assessment of health effects, since products derived from these plants can introduce new herbicide residues into the food chain.

The US is the world’s second-largest producer of soya beans, accounting for 28 percent of global production. Large agribusiness corporations are highly dependent on exports. The American Soybean Association (ASA) had announced that 2025 would mark a third straight year of losses, while the National Corn Growers Association raised alarms about “the economic crisis hitting rural America.” In 2025, losses for the nine major commodity crops ranged from \$35 billion to \$44 billion.

Under this trade agreement with the US, Bangladesh is not importing soybean and corn directly; they will come through the import of meat and dairy products and other soybean- and corn-based products. Besides, a genetically modified growth hormone called recombinant bovine somatotropin (rBST) is used to increase cows’ milk production by 10-15 percent. Milk from rBST-treated cows is used to make ice cream, butter, cheese, and yoghurt.

## What do we do now?

The US Reciprocal Trade Agreement was concluded with nine countries. Among these, Malaysia was the first country to declare the trade deal with the US invalid on March 15, 2026. This should prompt Bangladesh to re-evaluate the deal or follow the Malaysian decision.

From a legal standpoint, Bangladesh is not bound to passively accept the consequences of a contested agreement. Article 6.5 permits termination, while Article 6.2 allows renegotiation. In international trade law, such clauses are not symbolic—they are instruments of sovereignty. The key question, therefore, is not about legality but political will.



**In Bangladesh, livestock keeping is part of the livelihoods of 80-85 percent of 4.1 crore households.**

PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUI

authenticated regulatory system in place.

## It’s nothing but GM soybean and Bt corn dumping

Article 1.6 of the agreement mandates that Bangladesh allow genetically modified (GM) products without pre-market approval, labelling, or additional regulation. US livestock are fed with genetically modified crops (soybean and corn). Article 1.6 states: “Bangladesh shall maintain, for products of agricultural biotechnology, science- and risk-based regulatory frameworks and efficient authorisation processes, to facilitate increased trade in such products.” It also states that these products shall be imported and marketed in Bangladesh for the same purposes without requiring pre-market

products which are considered hazardous by other countries. In the manner of a typical neocolonial power, the US used tariff threats to achieve economic, political, and trade concessions.

The corn and soybeans used for chicken, dairy and meat cattle feed in the US are genetically modified. US chicken feed also contains meat meal from recycled animal by-products (mainly beef and pork). This is a sensitive issue for Bangladesh, with over 90 percent of the population being Muslim. Over 90 percent of the acreage planted with GM soybean varieties in the US has primarily herbicide-tolerant traits, like MON89788 and DAS-44406, for chemical weed control.

According to a 2019 study by the European Union, many weeds (47 species worldwide)

# The capacity-competence gap in our power sector



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Somewhere in Bangladesh, a power plant stands ready to run but sits idle anyway. On most days, it remains offline not because fuel is scarce, but because of a commercial stalemate: decision-makers with dispatch authority lack the expertise to balance operational costs against a mounting revenue deficit. Recent fuel shortage is compounding the picture further as households endure hours of load-shedding while capacity payments accumulate. Either way, the turbines stay silent. This is symptomatic of systemic dysfunction.

Since 2009, installed generation capacity has grown from under 5,000MW to more than 30,000MW in 2025, and electricity access expanded from 47 percent of the population to over 99 percent. Yet, the reserve margin now stands at around 61.3 percent. Per a simplistic calculation, more than half of installed capacity draws capacity payments while generating nothing on a given day. Average unit generation cost has reached roughly Tk 12.35 against a bulk tariff of around Tk 6.63. Annual losses of Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) rose from Tk 5,468 crore in FY2015 to Tk 50,565 crore in FY2025. Between FY2020 and FY2024, the resulting subsidies totalled Tk 1,26,700 crore. A government review found that capacity increased fourfold over the last 15 years while costs jumped elevenfold. Meanwhile, merit-order dispatch—that is, the basic principle of running cheaper plants first—is not consistently applied.

Bangladesh has poured billions into infrastructure, but this investment has not been matched by commitment to the human capital and governance frameworks essential for operational success. The Integrated Energy and Power Master Plan (IEPMP) 2023 maps a future that includes the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant (RNPP), ultra-supercritical coal technology, and



**The Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant project might be the clearest illustration of the capacity-competence disconnect of the country’s energy sector.**

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

a massive scale-up of renewable energy. Each of these demands a qualitatively different capability, engineers who understand nuclear safety, grid integration of variable renewables, Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) and smart grid operations, and high-voltage systems. Above all, we need leaders who can outmanoeuvre political pressure with commercial logic. Shallow knowledge of energy economics, power purchase agreements (PPAs), and the regulatory framework risks locking the sector into contracts it cannot afford for decades.

The clearest illustration of the competency gap is the 2,400MW RNPP project, financed largely by a \$11.38 billion Russian loan. Its first unit secured a commissioning licence for fuel loading this month (which started on yesterday), marking a critical step towards operational readiness. However, a licence is not a substitute for local competency. It requires at least 1,600 trained engineers for safe long-term operation. Despite 1,000 personnel being trained

since 2019 and ongoing specialised training, Bangladesh will remain heavily dependent on Russian engineers for the initial years of operation. This gap will reflect a heavy cost on operating margins, safety accountability, and strategic leverage that all remain, for now, in foreign hands.

However, Bangladesh Power

institutional capacity to fulfil its own mandate, let alone an expanded one for renewable transition demands.

In contrast, India’s National Power Training Institute (NPTI), for example, has trained over 470,000 professionals across 11 regional centres, spanning smart grids, SCADA, thermal, hydro, renewable energy, and regulatory affairs. What separates NPTI from BPMI is not ambition but structure. Success at NPTI, South Korea’s KEPCO, or Malaysia’s Tenaga Nasional were built on consistent funding and the institutional independence to attract top-tier experts. They treated competency as a prerequisite for success, not a reward for it. Even as BPMI launches a new Renewable Energy Training Facility with German support, the core truth remains: we cannot govern what we have not mastered.

The solution lies in mobilising existing institutions, not creating new ones. BPMI must break ground in Keraniganj and fast-track the campus to full functionality under leadership with deep engineering

credentials and a board that bridges public and private expertise. To meet the sector’s needs, annual training must scale up from a few thousand to tens of thousands. While the NPTI took five decades to train 470,000 professionals in India, Bangladesh lacks the luxury of time; our investment must be faster and far more aggressive. Furthermore, BPMI must establish a state-of-the-art laboratory to drive world-class training, testing, and research and development.

We must consolidate BPMI, the BPDB training directorate, SREDA, and Power Cell into a national framework rewarding competence over seniority. Certification for everyone, from operators to controllers, should be based on verifiable exams rather than mere attendance. Real gains happen when the system rewards measurable outcomes, not just time spent in a classroom.

It should also be noted that financial haemorrhaging starts at the top. The massive subsidy burden reflects mismanagement via opaque

contracts and unchecked demand forecasts made without sound financial analysis. To mitigate this, we must equip a new generation of leaders with regulatory and contractual expertise required for the domestic market.

Bangladesh’s achievement of universal electrification in a single generation is remarkable. Yet, despite established institutions like BPMI and SREDA, the sector faces a stark reality: wholesale losses exceeding Tk 3 per unit, a 61.3 percent reserve margin coupled with persistent load-shedding, and a continued reliance on foreign expertise for its first nuclear plant. These factors signal a gap between our institutional frameworks and operational realities.

The country’s energy story is shifting from a race for megawatts to a quest for competence. The mission is no longer simply to build but to manage, negotiate and optimise. Since the country’s ability to construct at scale has been proven, the test now is whether it has the determination to govern too.

**Dhaka South City Corporation**  
Engineering Department  
Electrical Circle

Memo No. 46.207.007.09.22.14.2026

Date: 28/04/2026

**Tender Notice**

Tender Notice is invited through e-GP Portal (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) by Executive Engineer, Electrical Circle, Dhaka South Corporation for the Procurement of following packages:

Sl No.	Tender ID	Description of work	Last selling (date & time)	Closing (date & time)
1	1265935	Supply & Installation of 11 KV High Tension Switchgear and CC TV Camera with related equipment at Kamalapur Strom Water Drainage Pump Station Under DSCC.	10-May-2026 01.00pm	10-May-2026 02.00pm
2	1258426	Supply & Installation of Spare Parts for Proper Running Existing Air Conditioners at Different Installations under Zone-2 of DSCC for FY: 2025-2026.	10-May-2026 01.00pm	10-May-2026 02.00pm

This is online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and hard copies/offline will not be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<https://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required.

The fees for downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank branches.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk ([helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd](mailto:helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd)).

If necessary, information please contact to the PE's Support Desk (02-223386009).

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