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Take steps to save haor harvest urgently

Govt must protect farmers' rights, check dyke construction anomalies

It is unacceptable that those who help sustain the country's food supply remain exposed to predictable risks year after year. Reportedly, thousands of farmers in the haor districts are facing heavy crop losses because of pre-monsoon rain, embankment breaches, labour shortages, and poor harvesting conditions. For farmers in these regions, Boro cultivation is often their only major yearly harvest and main source of income. When their ripe paddy goes under water just before harvest, they lose a whole year's livelihood, not to mention their ability to repay debts. Why are our farmers still so vulnerable to predictable seasonal threats despite repeated warnings?

For nearly a decade, our northeastern region has suffered excessive pre-monsoon rainfall and early flash floods, with the disasters of 2017 and 2022 still fresh in public memory. Weak embankments, delayed repairs, poor preparedness, labour shortages, inadequate drying and storage facilities, and limited financial protection continue to leave farmers vulnerable. The haor region produces around 20 percent of the country's rice annually, while Boro accounts for nearly 55 percent of national rice output, meaning current losses pose a serious threat to our food security.

About 65-70 percent of all Boro paddy in the haor districts has been harvested; now farmers are under pressure to finish the rest. Many farmers report that ripe paddy in their fields remains submerged, while harvesters cannot operate in waterlogged fields and labour is either scarce or costly. Some have even been forced to sell wet paddy at low prices, while others have lost everything after farming on loans. For instance, Ratan Mia from Kishoreganj's Austagram upazila lost his entire 10-acre crop to flooding.

Meanwhile, fresh embankment breaches in Sunamganj have raised serious concerns over alleged corruption and irregularities in embankment construction. Every year, large allocations are made for haor protection embankments, but allegations of substandard earthwork, mismanagement of funds, and syndicate influence persist. Locals claim that embankments are often poorly planned or left incomplete, while oversight remains weak. At a recent gathering in Sunamganj, a 10-point demand was raised that included compensation for flood-hit farmers, loan waivers, and a judicial probe into irregularities. The government must address these sincerely.

It is reassuring that the government has promised assistance for farmers affected by heavy rainfall in the next three months. Their other demands must also be taken into consideration. It must act immediately to protect both crops and farmers' livelihoods. As water levels rise, urgent mobilisation of labour and harvesting support is needed to save the remaining crops. Mobile drying units and transport assistance should also be provided. Fair procurement prices for wet or damaged paddy must be ensured to prevent exploitation by middlemen. An independent review of embankment failures and delays is crucial as well. In the long term, climate-resilient infrastructure, crop insurance, and early warning systems must be prioritised. Haor farmers must not be left to face such disasters without support.

Appoint new ACC without further delay

Leaving the graft watchdog leaderless is unacceptable

It is a matter of grave disappointment that a key statutory body like the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has been left in a state of paralysis for nearly two months. After all members of the last commission resigned "voluntarily" on March 3, merely two weeks after the newly elected BNP government took office, the ACC's crucial operations—pursuing cases, investigations, and enforcement actions—have come under significant constraint. Appointed by the interim government in December 2024 for a five-year term, that commission lasted for just over 15 months.

During this short period, however, it set a new bar for pursuing corruption cases, managing to investigate around 18 percent of the complaints it received in 2025—an institutional record since its inception in 2004. The conviction rate in disposed cases rose to 52 percent, up from the previous year's 48 percent. But due to the present leadership vacuum, all this progress now faces the risk of stalling. Decisions regarding case filings and other procedures are reportedly being delayed, effectively compromising graft prevention.

It may be recalled that a month after the last commission resigned—a decision made in "public interest," according to the then ACC chief—the Anti-Corruption Commission (Amendment) Ordinance, 2025 issued during the interim period was allowed to expire on April 11, along with several other key ordinances. As a result, the previous 2004 ACC Act was reinstated with immediate effect, leaving the government the scope to form a search committee to find suitable candidates for the new commission. Nearly three weeks on, we have not seen any such steps from the government. Preliminary discussions on forming the search committee reportedly began shortly after the commission's dissolution, but the final nod to officially start the process has yet to come.

This raises questions regarding the BNP government's "zero tolerance" stance on corruption. Eradicating corruption was one of the core pledges of its election manifesto. Naturally, reconstituting the ACC, the country's primary body responsible for keeping high-profile, large-scale corruption in check, is a crucial first step towards achieving that goal. What's holding the government back from doing so, then? We don't see any justification for further delaying this crucial task. The government must promptly form a search committee to recruit the next commissioners so that ACC's work can continue without a hitch. The government must also ensure that it can carry out its duties as intended: independently, without undue influence. A change in government, political or otherwise, should not have any bearing on autonomous bodies like the ACC.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Adolf Hitler dies by suicide

On this day in 1945, holed up in a bunker under his headquarters in Berlin, Adolf Hitler died by suicide by swallowing a cyanide capsule and shooting himself in the head. Soon after, Germany unconditionally surrendered to the allied forces, ending Hitler's dream of a "1,000-year" reich.

More lanes or trains? Rethinking the Dhaka-Chattoogram corridor



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Every day, thousands of trucks carry containers, raw materials, and export goods along the Dhaka-Chattoogram highway, alongside rising passenger traffic. This corridor also connects the capital with Chattoogram Port, the gateway for most of Bangladesh's international trade. As economic activity expands, pressure on the corridor and dependence on imported fuel also rise. This route is already one of the most fuel-intensive segments of the transport network. Despite expansion to four lanes, congestion persists.

Proposals to widen the highway into a 10-lane corridor or elevated expressway reflect the scale of the problem. But expanding roads alone risks locking Bangladesh into a fossil fuel-dependent transport model. The real question is not how to accommodate more vehicles, but how to reduce reliance on them. That shift requires a decisive move toward rail. Without a shift in the transport mix, more road capacity may lead to higher fuel use and greater exposure to energy shocks. Heavy trucks remain the backbone of this corridor, but they also create the greatest energy burden by accelerating road deterioration, increasing maintenance costs, and consuming large volumes of diesel. In a global environment marked by volatile energy prices, this dependence exposes Bangladesh to recurring economic vulnerability. In this scenario, rail offers a strategic alternative.

Rail transport is significantly more energy-efficient, especially for freight. One freight train can replace roughly 40-60 heavy trucks, while moving a container using about one-fifth the fuel and emitting one-fifth as much carbon as trucks. This reduces dependence on imported diesel while easing pressure on infrastructure and foreign exchange reserves. For Bangladesh, the long-discussed Dhaka-Chattoogram chord line presents a practical opportunity to make this transition. By creating a more direct alignment between the two cities, the chord line



The aim should not be to accommodate more vehicles on the Dhaka-Chattoogram highway, but to reduce reliance on them and thus reduce fuel use.

FILE PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

would shorten travel distance, enable faster passenger services, and expand capacity for freight movement. This does not require ultra-high-speed systems like Japan's Shinkansen. A modern medium-speed railway operating at 140-160 kilometres per hour would be sufficient.

This could reduce passenger travel times to around two hours, but the greater impact would be on freight movement. Shifting even a portion of container movement from trucks to rail would reduce congestion, lower fuel consumption, and improve logistics reliability, thus creating a more balanced system where rail and road share the load.

Nevertheless, this shift must be supported by a broader reconfiguration of inland logistics. Expanding inland container depot capacity closer to industrial clusters—particularly around Narayanganj—can significantly reduce long-haul trucking. Fast-tracking projects such as Dhirasram Inland Container Depot

(ICD) or the proposed Pubail ICD would allow cargo to be consolidated and moved in bulk by rail, rather than dispersed across thousands of truck trips. Together with a chord line, these facilities could form the backbone of a more energy-efficient multimodal system.

However, infrastructure alone will not deliver these benefits unless

be to translate this vision into a phased railway roadmap. Priority should be given to developing a Dhaka-Narayanganj-Chattoogram chord line as a modern broad-gauge corridor, creating a more direct and high-capacity rail link between Dhaka and Chattoogram. Meanwhile, institutional reform by opening access for private operators under a regulated framework should be put in place and railway-based inland logistics should be strengthened through the development of ICDs in strategic locations under public-private partnership models. Together, these steps would create an integrated rail-led system capable of shifting a substantial share of cargo away from roads, reducing fuel consumption, and strengthening long-term resilience.

Recent discussions on the proposed Teknaf-Tetulia economic corridor highlight the need for a more integrated approach to transport planning in Bangladesh. The initiative reflects a shift toward viewing corridors not merely as roads, but as systems linking logistics, industry, and regional connectivity, while emphasising sustainability. This reinforces a central point: how connectivity is designed, particularly in energy use and transport mode, will determine long-term sustainability.

Linking Matarbari deep-sea port with the Mirsarai economic zone and extending rail-based ICD development toward the northwest, such as Nilphamari, could help translate this vision into a more balanced, rail-led national logistics corridor. Globally, countries facing similar challenges are already moving in this direction. China has expanded rail corridors linking ports with inland industrial regions. India is developing its Dedicated Freight Corridor to reduce logistics costs and energy use. Across Europe, rail plays a central role in reducing transport-related emissions. These are not just transport investments; they are energy strategies.

Bangladesh now faces a similar choice. Continuing to expand highways without strengthening rail will deepen long-term dependence on fossil fuels. In contrast, investing in rail, supported by institutional reform and inland logistics development, offers a pathway toward a more resilient and energy-efficient transport system. The choice we are facing is not between a 10-lane highway or an elevated expressway; it is between more lanes or less fuel.

institutional constraints within the railway sector are addressed. One persistent challenge is the shortage of locomotives and trained locomotives, which limits effective use of existing rail capacity. As long as freight depends on spare locomotives from passenger services, a reliable rail logistics system will remain difficult.

There is, therefore, a strong case for revisiting the Railways Act, 1890, to allow regulated participation of private operators on designated corridors. Opening railway tracks to private freight operators is a practical response to capacity constraints. It would enable additional locomotive investment, improve service reliability, and introduce operational flexibility. Without such reform, even well-planned infrastructure investments—including a Dhaka-Chattoogram chord line—risk delivering only partial results. With it, Bangladesh could unlock the full potential of its rail network.

A practical way forward would

Our solar ambition needs skilled hands to succeed

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Bangladesh's economy remains highly susceptible to price volatility in the international energy market. This vulnerability became fairly evident when the Russia-Ukraine war broke out in 2022 and more recently, when the Iran-US conflict began in March this year. The war in the Middle East has resulted in an abnormal hike in the price of liquefied natural gas (LNG), forcing the country to seek costlier spot cargoes. This event exposed how quickly a distant war can travel through the Strait of Hormuz into domestic power shortages, industrial anxiety, and fiscal pressure. Imported LNG accounts for more than 25 percent of Bangladesh's national total gas consumption, and about 42 percent of total gas consumption goes to the power sector. And this is precisely why solar must be treated as an energy security strategy, not merely a climate aspiration.

The recent national energy policy of Bangladesh is the Renewable Energy Policy (REP) 2025 that sets a target to generate 20 percent of the country's electricity from renewable sources by 2030 and 30 percent by 2041. The policy recognises the country's dependence on natural gas and other fossil fuels and connects renewable expansion with local manufacturing capability, cost competitiveness, and human resource development. There is no lack of ambition when it comes to increasing renewable energy capacity.

Current SREDA dashboards on renewables show that Bangladesh has about 1.74 gigawatt (GW) of installed renewable capacity, accounting for about 5.24 percent of total installed energy generation capacity, of which 1.45 GW is represented by solar, consisting of solar parks, rooftop net metering, and solar home systems (SHS). Apart from solar installations, there are initiatives in solar panel exports and foreign investment in



Bangladesh needs a highly skilled workforce competent in maintaining its solar infrastructure. PHOTO: COLLECTED

solar. In June 2025, Radiant Alliance, a Bangladesh-based company, exported solar panels to the US market for the first time. In March 2025, Chinese solar manufacturer Longi revealed plans to invest in solar panel manufacturing in Bangladesh.

The government has also pushed some big rollouts on solar expansion. In December 2025, the erstwhile interim government approved 12 new private solar plants with a combined capacity of 918 MW. As part of the National Rooftop Solar Program 2025, the government aims to install 3,000 MW equivalent of solar panels on state-owned buildings, alongside

net metering reforms that now allow systems up to 100 percent of sanctioned load, compared to about 70 percent in the past. The sanctioned load is the maximum amount of power that an electricity provider authorises a consumer to use at any given time. However, so far most of such scaling only exists on paper and we are left with an uncomfortable question: who will build, install, test, service, and maintain all this capacity? This is where the bottleneck begins.

Bangladesh may be announcing a solar manufacturing and deployment push, but its training pipeline is not ready for it yet. A 2024 future-skills study on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Bangladesh found a serious shortage of skilled workers and a persistent mismatch between what graduates learn and what employers need. Around 60 percent of the study's respondents said that their technical skills needed further improvement after graduation. The same study also claimed that the National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF) is not implemented fully and the student enrolment exceeds infrastructural capacity. Furthermore, the students do not benefit from learning to operate old and obsolete machines when companies recruit for newer technologies. The graduates also ultimately struggle in the labour market due to a lack of coordination between training institutions and employers. This becomes problematic when it comes to readying a workforce to maintain the country's solar infrastructure as the sector is heavily reliant on practical know-how than just theoretical knowledge.

The REP 2025 opens doors to production-based incentives, tax exemptions, and duty or VAT cuts on certain solar components. These measures can help local industries grow, but they do not run on policy

alone. They run on technicians, supervisors, quality inspectors, electricians, operators, trainers, and after-sales service teams. Solar localisation without skills localisation is unlikely to achieve much. Meanwhile, implementation problems are already visible in reality. There are debates over rooftop solar costs, import duties on accessories, and whether the policy mix is helping adoption fast enough. Apparel sector entrepreneurs argue that import taxes increase system costs just when rooftop solar could decrease both energy vulnerability and carbon emissions. At the same time, the government wants to protect and nurture local manufacturing. However, even if tariffs are perfectly balanced, Bangladesh will still struggle unless it produces enough competent workers for a growing solar ecosystem.

The good news is that the REP 2025 already has a practical opening. It directs SREDA to support training and research, encourage renewable energy curriculum from the school level to university, and maintain a national database for designers, installers, maintenance professionals, suppliers, importers, manufacturers, and EPC companies. The database could become the backbone of certification, accountability, and labour market visibility. The conflicts around the world may calm down soon enough and shipping routes may regain normalcy too, resulting in spot LNG prices to stabilise. However, Bangladesh's skills gap will persist unless the country treats it as seriously as it treats capacity targets. A panel on a rooftop cannot secure a factory, a school, or a grid if no one is there to install it properly, certify it credibly, or repair it when it breaks down. Bangladesh needs more solar, but it needs a workforce for it even more. Energy security will not come from solar panels alone but from the skilled hands that make them work.