

Stop trafficking of youths into war

Govt must clarify what it did to stop recruitment in Russia-Ukraine war

Every time news of a Bangladeshi migrant killed in the Russia-Ukraine war reaches home, it not only devastates a family but also resurfaces the question of why our migrants are being used as pawns in foreign wars. The easy answer is human trafficking; the difficult truth is that our government, past and present, has failed to prevent this trade in human lives lost on the frontlines in distant countries.

The news of the death of 28-year-old Md Riyad Rashid in a Ukrainian drone attack on May 2 near the Russia-Ukraine border comes after a report by international human rights organisations Fortify Rights and Truth Hounds revealed that at least 34 Bangladeshis were killed in the Russia-Ukraine war as of February 2026. However, the informal channels through which news of the deaths arrives suggest that the actual number of Bangladeshi migrants killed could be even higher. For instance, in Riyad's case, his friend Limon Dutta, who was injured in the same drone attack, informed Riyad's parents that another Bangladeshi had also been killed alongside their son, but he could not confirm his identity. Riyad's parents didn't know he was fighting on the frontlines. In 2024, when he left for Russia, he was supposed to work for a company.

According to Fortify Rights and Truth Hounds, many of these migrants have been misled, exploited, and financially trapped into joining the combat. Traffickers in Bangladesh exploit the financial desperation of young men like Riyad, making them believe that they would either work in factories in Europe or serve in non-combat roles in the Russian military. And the recruitment is not free. Hopeful migrants often pay between Tk 1.2 lakh and Tk 6 lakh to brokers. Of course, no one would pay such sums to brokers to join a war in which they have no stake, especially at the risk of losing their lives. What is needed, therefore, is stern action from the government to identify and crack down on these fraudulent recruitment networks.

Recently, the UK government slapped sanctions on a Bangladeshi travel agency, Dream Home Travels and Tours Ltd, accusing it of exploiting vulnerable migrants to support Moscow's war in Ukraine. If the UK could identify Bangladeshi firms allegedly involved in such activities, similar tasks should not be impossible for our law enforcers and intelligence agencies. In the meantime, the government must run a strong campaign to raise awareness about these exploitative recruitment agencies. It must also initiate diplomatic measures to press Russia to stop employing Bangladeshis in military roles and repatriate those already on the frontlines. Most importantly, the bodies of those killed must be returned to their loved ones. Our young men are not foot soldiers to be sacrificed in distant wars.

Save Dhaka from recurring waterlogging

Fix the broken drainage system, restore the canal network

It is completely unacceptable that after years of projects, promises, and public spending, Dhaka still remains unprepared to tackle waterlogging. With the monsoon season approaching, the city authorities have identified 141 locations vulnerable to waterlogging—108 in Dhaka North (DNCC) and 33 in Dhaka South (DSCC). While identifying these hotspots is a necessary first step towards reducing the risks, it also reveals the long standing failure of the authorities to deliver a lasting solution.

As urban planners have pointed out time and again, stormwater cannot drain properly in Dhaka because secondary and tertiary drainage channels remain poorly connected to the city's primary discharge points. In many areas, there is simply no effective route for water to flow into rivers or retention ponds. Even where canals have been partially restored, fresh encroachment and poor maintenance continue to undermine progress. DNCC officials have admitted that several areas, including Ashkona, Dakshinkhan, and Uttarkhan, lack proper drainage outlets because canals and wetlands have been encroached upon. DSCC officials, meanwhile, have linked the worsening waterlogging in New Market and surrounding areas to blocked drainage routes. Unfortunately, despite being fully aware of the causes, the authorities' response remains largely reactive and fragmented. Short-term steps such as cleaning drains, excavating canals, deploying pumps, and setting up emergency response teams may ease immediate grievances, but they are no substitute for a comprehensive and sustainable drainage plan.

And city residents are paying a heavy price for this failure. Even short spells of rainfall now routinely inundate roads, disrupt traffic, and make daily commuting miserable. Waterlogging has already become common in many parts of the city even before the monsoon begins, increasing the risk of dengue outbreaks. At the same time, pre-monsoon road digging has added to public suffering, making everyday movement across the city even more difficult. Meanwhile, the DSCC has proposed another Tk 250-300 crore project to improve drainage connectivity in Dhanmondi, New Market, and Bakshibazar areas, while DNCC has set a target of bringing Mirpur under near zero-flooding conditions. The question, however, is whether these initiatives will finally deliver results.

Dhaka's waterlogging crisis cannot be resolved through isolated projects undertaken separately by the two city corporations. An integrated drainage master plan, based on scientific assessment, proper canal restoration, and coordinated water management across the entire city, is urgently needed. The authorities must prioritise reconnecting canals and drainage lines, recovering encroached waterways and wetlands, and ensuring regular maintenance of the drainage network. Public awareness campaigns are also essential to prevent indiscriminate dumping of waste into drains and canals. Above all, policymakers must recognise that waterlogging is a major urban governance failure that requires a permanent solution.

Why Bangladesh-India relations keep resetting without settling



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In a repeat of past experiences, India's ties with Bangladesh, its immediate neighbour and strategic partner, are now entering another phase of recalibration. Since political uncertainty in Dhaka began nearly two years ago, hopes now exist for a restart following a new political order early this year. Diplomatic moves, such as reopening dialogue between officials in Dhaka and New Delhi, renewed military cooperation, and discussions on economic connectivity, indicate that things are looking up after the turbulent period. However, beneath all this lies another, more troubling story of mutual mistrust, unresolved disputes, and strategic concerns.

This new phase in Bangladesh-India relations is marked by a contradiction. On the one hand, Dhaka and New Delhi understand that their confrontation cannot continue; on the other, both parties still lack solutions to the problems arising from the previous disputes. As recent analysis shows, while official and intelligence ties have been restored to some degree, they remain fragile and transactional rather than deep, reflecting the very nature of the relations between the two neighbours.

The first driving force behind the latest development is the internal change in Bangladesh's politics. Following the transition after the uprising and later the change in power through the electoral route, the country's present leadership appears to have adopted a more pragmatic approach to its relations with India, especially in trade and energy. It is well-received by the Indian government as New Delhi always seeks stability in Bangladesh, seeing it as part of its strategic eastern frontier.

However, this does not mean everything is fine between the neighbours now. At least three aspects continue to define their interaction: political distrust, border issues, and questions related to river sharing.

First, problems with political trust caused by past confrontations still

persist. The fear of the other country's influence is the main concern for both. In particular, the fact that the Awami League leaders are still in exile in India causes irritation that cannot be easily resolved. The problem surfaces whenever tensions in Bangladesh increase.

Second, border management and security cooperation remain unpredictable and sometimes contradictory. Despite the existence of specific institutions, friction persists



FILE VISUAL: FATIMA JAHAN ENA

over migration issues, smuggling networks, and enforcement practices. When the official narrative speaks of cooperation on security issues, there is more friction, as evidenced by public discourse.

Third, water distribution problems remain one of the greatest structural issues of Bangladesh-India relations. From signing the Ganges agreement to discussing possible solutions to the Teesta dispute, both sides have failed to overcome problems in this sphere. Given the growing climate stress in South Asia, water distribution problems can soon be a bigger pressure on the relationship.

The outcome of the recently held

West Bengal legislative assembly election introduces a new variable to this equation. With political power in West Bengal now aligning with the centre, there may now be greater room—in principle, at least—for movement on long-pending issues such as the Teesta River water-sharing agreement, which has historically been constrained by state-level resistance. However, at the same time, the electoral outcome reflects a sharpening of political contestation in border regions, particularly in North Bengal, where identity and security narratives are increasingly prominent. This could heighten sensitivities along the Bangladesh-India frontier and, in turn, risk amplifying communal undertones in politics on both sides.

However, the strongest stabilising force in the bilateral relations of the two countries remains economic interdependence. Bangladesh depends

Chinese presence in South Asia. For India, it raises fears of strategic encirclement, while for Bangladesh, it brings some benefits alongside dependency problems. All this makes negotiations even more complicated.

The domestic politics of the two neighbours also affect the process. For instance, India's relations with Bangladesh cannot help but be affected by the subnational political considerations in its eastern states. As for Bangladesh, its position towards India is shaped not only by external pressure but also by domestic issues related to the country's identity and its relations with its neighbour.

Yet, despite all these obstacles, there are reasons to believe that the new period of cooperation will continue. The interdependence of communication and renewed military cooperation, alongside economic interdependence, indicate that neither side wants a confrontation. The latest developments demonstrate the readiness to avoid an escalation. In general, Bangladesh-India relations should be described as a phase of "managed normalisation" in which the two countries begin engaging across different spheres without resolving the existing contradictions.

Thus, the question here is not about improvement, but about whether improvement can be sustainable without overcoming the existing contradictions. Historical experience shows that tactical resets in Bangladesh-India relations occur regularly, but strategic consolidation is rare. Every cycle is usually replaced by the next confrontation as political circumstances change.

It appears that Bangladesh's strategic autonomy should coincide with a stable stance towards its largest neighbour. Meanwhile, for India, the solution lies in balancing security with its strategic goal of regional integration. In both cases, the shift should take place from episodic diplomacy to more institutionalised cooperation.

In conclusion, the Bangladesh-India relations do not hinge upon any single agreement or crisis. They depend on accumulated history, overlapping interests, and recurrent worries. The current phase provides opportunities to go beyond reactive diplomacy. Whether the advantage is used will determine if the thaw turns into long-term improvement or just another interruption of the process.

Bridging the financing gap in our renewables transition



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The energy crisis born of the ongoing US-Israel war on Iran has revealed a critical reality: Bangladesh has never been adequately prepared to deal with such external shocks. In any economy, disruptions caused by these shocks are inevitable. The key question, however, is how prepared a government is to manage them—how much it has learnt from previous crises and whether it has taken sufficient precautionary measures to face future disruptions.

In Bangladesh, all governments have followed a similar pattern when dealing with an economic shock. Policymakers tend to adopt short-term measures to tackle the immediate impact, but once it subsides, they don't pursue long-term, sustainable policies. As a result, when new shocks arise, the country's limited capacity to respond effectively becomes exposed, highlighting deep-rooted economic vulnerabilities.

The burden of this failure ultimately falls on ordinary citizens. The combined impact of the Covid pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine War exposed the country's excessive dependency on imported fossil fuels. Did the government successfully implement any long-term strategy to address the energy crisis during that period? The answer is no. The shock triggered by the war pushed inflation in Bangladesh into double digits. Foreign exchange reserves declined

sharply, and the domestic currency depreciated. Despite these warning signals, the government failed to diversify its sources of imported energy and did not accelerate the transition to renewables.

Had Bangladesh undergone a significant renewable energy transition—similar to Pakistan, for example, which significantly achieved a 46 percent share of renewables in its electricity generation mix as of September 2025—it would have been better positioned to handle the impact of the current Middle East tensions. So far, renewables have accounted for only 5.38 percent of the country's total energy mix.

Energy is widely recognised as one of the most critical resources in the global economy and is likely to become a defining factor in the coming years. Therefore, Bangladesh must prioritise a long-term strategy to accelerate the transition to renewable energy. Sadly, there are several barriers to this transition, and among them, the financing gap remains the most significant.

A number of structural challenges continue to discourage investment in renewables. Currency instability, frequent regulatory and policy changes, off-taker risk, weak project pipelines, technology and performance risks, lower sovereign credit rating, a cumbersome

loan disbursement process, land acquisition challenges, and a lack of reliable guarantees dissuade foreign investors from committing long-term capital into the renewable energy sector. Meanwhile, local investors are not interested in investing in utility-scale renewables projects due to the lengthy land acquisition process, short-term lending horizons offered by local banks, and the removal of the "implementation agreement" clause, similar to a sovereign guarantee.

A 2025 assessment by the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) revealed that Bangladesh would require up to \$980 million annually to meet its renewable energy goal of 2030, which 20 percent renewables in its power generation mix. In the following decade, the country will need up to \$1.46 billion a year to meet its 2041 goal—30 percent renewables in power generation. This means it must increase its existing annual investment flow of \$238 million by four to six times in the next 5-15 years. Public finance cannot meet these funding requirements on its own, necessitating large-scale private investment. The country also faces a lack of strong bankable projects due to the absence of feasibility studies and unresolved issues around land or rooftop access.

Though the Bangladesh Bank has expanded its green financing scheme to Tk 1,000 crore, the loan ceiling of Tk 30 crore remains far below the capital requirements of utility-scale projects such as a 10MW solar park. Small-scale renewables projects in rural areas face even greater challenges as financial institutions often perceive small-scale projects as risky and demand high collateral.

The lack of supportive incentives for domestic companies further reflects a gap in policy foresight. When

procurement entities prepare tender documents, they often believe that adding more conditions increases credibility. Consequently, they impose requirements that local companies find difficult to meet. For example, in a 10MW project, the tender security requirement may be around Tk 2 crore. How many companies in Bangladesh are capable of providing such a large tender deposit? Obtaining a Bank Guarantee (BG) facility may also cost Tk 2-3 crore. If such a large amount of capital becomes tied up in a single security deposit, a company's other business operations may come to a halt. As a result, many companies are compelled to seek foreign partners as securing such a large fund locally is difficult. Although authorities often claim that they have established strict procurement systems, these systems do not necessarily benefit local companies.

To address these challenges, Bangladesh must urgently reform the existing financing scheme for renewable energy projects. The government should expand the Bangladesh Bank's refinancing schemes by collaborating with development partners to mobilise additional funds and strengthen financing capacity. Financing procedures need to be simplified and made more accessible.

Additionally, the government should introduce low-cost, dedicated financing schemes for small-scale renewables projects such as rooftop solar and solar irrigation. It can also offer a credit risk guarantee scheme and a dedicated green finance facility with scope for pre-finance to accelerate the flow of funds for small-scale renewable energy projects. Finally, the government should introduce a feed-in tariff policy to facilitate both domestic and foreign investment in renewable energy technologies.