

Hours of power outages have left paddle-wheel aerators idle at semi-intensive shrimp farms, raising the risk of shrimp mortality. The top photo, taken yesterday afternoon, shows an aerator at a farm in Chak Soilmari of Batiaghata upazila in Khulna. *Inset,* an aerial view of shrimp enclosures in Deluti village of Dumuria upazila.

PHOTOS: TRINA BOIRAGI AND HABIBUR RAHMAN

Power shortages threaten Khulna's shrimp sector

Farmers and processors struggle as prolonged outages disrupt production

DIPANKAR ROY, *Khulna*

Frequent power outages across southwestern Bangladesh are pushing the country's export-oriented shrimp industry deeper into uncertainty, disrupting production at farms and processing factories as growers and exporters grapple with prolonged electricity shortages.

According to the Fisheries Department, 33,437.13 hectares are under shrimp and prawn farming in Khulna, 38,982.14 hectares in Bagerhat and 74,249 hectares in Satkhira.

From semi-intensive shrimp farms in Khulna, Bagerhat and Satkhira to processing factories in Rupsha and other industrial areas, unreliable electricity has become a serious threat to one of Bangladesh's leading agricultural export sectors.

Farmers are struggling to keep shrimp alive in oxygen-starved ponds, while processors are relying on costly diesel to keep cold storage running and meet export commitments.

The crisis comes as the industry is already grappling with weak global demand, rising production costs, disease outbreaks, a shortage of quality post-larvae and factory closures.

FARMERS STRUGGLE TO KEEP SHRIMP ALIVE

"Whenever power goes out for several hours, we become anxious. The aerators stop, oxygen levels fall, and the shrimp begin to suffer. If electricity is not restored quickly, we risk losing an entire crop," said Sutanu Gain, who operates 10 semi-intensive shrimp ponds in Batiaghata upazila.

Even a few hours without aeration can sharply increase shrimp mortality in semi-intensive farms.

"There are around 250 semi-intensive shrimp farms in our locality, all of which are facing severe electricity shortages," said Nittananda Mondal of Bandha village in Dumuria.

At least 20 farm owners have lost nearly all their shrimp fry because they could not operate their paddle-wheel aerators, he claimed.

"We are spending far more on diesel than we planned. Many small and medium farmers simply cannot afford to run generators for long hours every day," said Bipprodash Boiragi, another shrimp farmer from Chak Soilmari.

Industry insiders say lower survival rates are worsening the raw material shortage facing processors and exporters, with disruptions rippling through the supply chain in southwestern Bangladesh, the country's main producer of export-bound black tiger shrimp.

PROCESSORS STRUGGLE TO CONTINUE OPERATIONS

The power crisis is also hitting shrimp processing factories, where uninterrupted electricity is essential to maintain food safety standards. Repeated outages are forcing factories to halt production, rely on diesel generators and absorb soaring operating costs.

Mizanur Rahman, assistant manager of Southern Foods Limited, said power outages lasted seven to 10 hours a day, forcing the company to consume around 75 litres of diesel an hour to keep its cold storage running.

"We can continue production using generators, but the cost is extremely high. Frequent outages also reduce productivity and disrupt delivery schedules," he said.

Nazmul Huda Chowdhury, manager of Rozemco Foods Limited in Rupsha, said continuous load-shedding over the past several days has increased the risk of spoilage. Maintaining the cold chain is essential for export-quality shrimp, he stressed.

According to the Bangladesh Frozen Foods Exporters Association, only 30 of the 109 registered shrimp processing factories in Khulna and 18 in Chattogram are operating.

The factories can process about 400,000 tonnes annually but are receiving only around seven percent of the shrimp they need.

Farmers are struggling to keep shrimp alive in oxygen-starved ponds, while processors are relying on costly diesel to keep cold storage running and meet export commitments

"This shortage of electricity has already forced many factories to suspend operations temporarily," said Shyamal Das, director of the association and managing director of MU Sea Foods Limited, warning that the disruption could undermine an industry supporting nearly six million people.

POWER SHORTAGES INTENSIFY PRESSURE

According to the West Zone Power Distribution Company, electricity demand in the Khulna zone reached 601MW at 1:00pm on Monday (August 3), while supply stood at 486MW, leaving a deficit of 115MW -- almost double the 59MW shortfall recorded a day earlier.

Khulna district and city recorded the largest shortage, with load-shedding rising to 52MW from 19MW a day earlier. Significant shortfalls were also reported in Kushtia, Magura, Jhenaidah, Meherpur, Narail and Chuadanga.

Across the WZPDCL service area, covering the Khulna and Barishal zones, demand reached 773MW against supply of 657MW, leaving a deficit of 116MW.

Rural shrimp-producing areas served by the Khulna Palli Bidyut Samiti have been among the worst affected.

Sanjay Kumar Roy, deputy general manager of the Dumuria Zonal Office under the Khulna Palli Bidyut Samiti, said extensive load-shedding had become unavoidable because electricity allocations were far below demand.

"Our four substations require between 23 and 25 megawatts, but in recent days we have received barely half of that," he said.

"Peak demand in our service area is around 80 to 85 megawatts, but we have been unable to meet it in recent days because of supply shortages. We understand that consumers are suffering," said Tushar Kanti Mondal, general manager of the Khulna Palli Bidyut Samiti.

Khulna District Fisheries Officer Md Badiuzzaman told The Daily Star that persistent outages had created serious challenges for semi-intensive shrimp farmers.

According to the district fisheries office, Khulna has 129 semi-intensive black tiger shrimp (bagda) farms covering 474.09 hectares and 155 freshwater prawn (golda) farms spanning 19.8 hectares. He warned prolonged disruptions could affect shrimp health, survival and production.

"Most farmers are now relying on generators during load-shedding to keep their aerators running. Those who cannot afford generators are using diesel-powered aerators instead, significantly increasing their production costs," he said.

Big names, broken trust

MAHTAB UDDIN AHMED

Here, hiring a Big Four firm can resemble buying an expensive wedding sherwani: worn once and remembered through the bill. The logo enters the boardroom first. If its report states the obvious, it becomes "global best practice". If a local consultant says the same thing, fee negotiations begin.

Early in my consultancy journey, a business group explained it avoided local advisers for fear its secrets might reach regulators or rivals. Another managing director said: "You know many people in the corporate sector, including my competitors. Subconsciously, you may pass our business secrets to them." Neither fear is misplaced here, where confidentiality sometimes lasts only until the next dinner. Australia supplied the punchline: a foreign passport does not vaccinate a consultant against temptation. In the PwC tax scandal, a partner advising the government under confidentiality on multinational tax avoidance shared sensitive information within PwC. It was used to help multinationals stay ahead of the rules. PwC Australia's chief executive resigned and nine partners stood down.

Then came KPMG. A whistleblower alleged confidential Lendlease board information was used to pursue audit work elsewhere. KPMG acknowledged its initial investigations lacked the necessary rigour. The inquiry also heard sensitive Optus information had been shared with a team seeking Telstra's audit. The chief executive and head of audit departed. ABC reported KPMG was temporarily frozen out of new federal work while 297 existing contracts worth AUD 653 million remained active.

Why does this happen? Trust has become the shop window; consulting is the shopping mall behind it. An Australian Treasury paper noted that audits generated only 20 percent of the four largest firms' revenue in 2025. Non-audit work had previously risen from 73 percent to 82 percent. Partners face growth targets and cross-selling incentives. A consultant may be sworn to secrecy while a colleague is rewarded for knowing what the competitor knows. Chinese walls drawn in PowerPoint can apparently develop convenient doors.



The risk in Bangladesh extends beyond business groups. Government agencies and development partners also favour well-known logos for credibility and reassurance. All four firms operate here through locally incorporated entities or member firms, but the global brands are networks of legally separate firms. Work and data may cross borders. A regional headquarters is geography, not a certificate of ethics, particularly where enforcement is weaker. When trouble arrives, clients may discover the brand was global but accountability remarkably local.

Boards must therefore replace admiration with architecture. Every engagement should identify the Bangladesh contracting entity, the resident accountable partner and overseas teams with data access. Contracts should require network-wide conflict checks, need-to-know access, local data storage, approval for cross-border transfers, audit trails, indemnities and personal accountability for breaches. Audit committees should prohibit the statutory auditor from sensitive strategy, forensic or tax structuring assignments, and periodically retender major work.

Qualified local professionals should be independent co-leads, chosen by the client, with access to evidence, methodology and working papers, not decorative subcontractors hired to arrange interviews. Public bodies and development agencies should publish the scope, fees, conflicts and deliverables while including a duty to act in the public interest. The UK Financial Reporting Council has operationally separated Big Four audit practices and established independent audit boards. Australia is considering firm licensing, stronger information controls, structural separation and mandatory retendering. Bangladesh's FRC and procurement authorities should adapt these safeguards.

The Big Four possess deep expertise. This is not an argument for professional nationalism. It is an argument against corporate hypnosis. Confidentiality is not a logo, and independence is not an imported adjective. Bangladesh should stop buying accountability by brand and start building it through contracts, local scrutiny and consequences.

The writer is the founder of BuildCon Consultancies Ltd and BuildNation Ltd

US has refunded about $100b in Trump tariffs

AFP, *Washington*

US President Donald Trump's administration has refunded about $100 billion in tariffs since the Supreme Court struck down a wave of his duties this year, court filings show.

The figure, reported in documents Tuesday, constitutes about 60 percent of some $166 billion the Trump administration collected after invoking the International Emergency Economic Powers Act to impose duties.

The refunds went to importers that had paid the duties.

Trump used the act to impose sweeping tariffs on trading partners since returning to the White House last year, but the high court ruled in February this year that he had exceeded his authority in doing so.

This dealt a sharp blow to the president's ability to deploy tariffs at will, as he sought to use them as a tool for leverage against US allies and competitors alike.

The president's sector-specific tariffs, which rely on different justifications, remain intact.

In the court filing on Tuesday, a US Customs and Border Protection official said that as of July 31, "approximately $128.68 billion in both potential and certified refunds" had been accepted for processing.

Of that total amount, refunds of around $100 billion had been completed and sent to the Treasury Department for disbursement, the official added.

Since the Supreme Court's ruling in February, Trump has turned to new means to reimpose tariffs on dozens of partners, sparking further court challenges.

Govt drafts revised gold policy

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

The government has drafted a revised national gold policy to bring the country's gold sector under a formal, regulated and accountable framework, aiming to increase transparency, legal trade, exports and government revenue.

Commerce Minister Khandakar Abdul Muktadir yesterday asked all relevant government agencies and stakeholders to submit written feedback on the draft "Gold Policy 2018 (Revised) 2026" by Sunday, August 9, according to a press release.

He gave the instruction at a meeting on the draft policy at the Secretariat in Dhaka.

The meeting, chaired by Commerce Secretary Md Ataur Rahman Khan, was attended by Enamul Haque Khan, president of the Bangladesh Jewellers Association (Bajus), Mohammad Hasan Arif, vice-chairman of the Export Promotion Bureau, and representatives from the National Board of Revenue, Bangladesh Bank, other government agencies and the gold sector.

The minister said the gold sector has long played an important role in the economy but has remained largely outside a formal institutional framework because of inadequate policies, regulations and weak oversight.

"We need to change our mindset. It is not right for a recognised business sector to remain outside a formal framework for so long," he said.

"We now want to bring the sector under a legal and institutional framework."

According to the minister, formalising the sector would create jobs, increase legal gold imports, raise government revenue and improve transparency in gold stocks and transactions. He said every stage of purchasing, selling and storing legally imported gold should be properly documented.

Muktadir added that gold held legally within the country helps preserve national wealth, similar to foreign exchange reserves.

To reduce gold smuggling, he said the gap between domestic and international gold prices should be kept reasonable. Duties and taxes should take into account international prices, especially in major trading hubs such as Dubai, he added.

The minister said the revised policy also aims to develop a gold jewellery manufacturing and export industry by allowing raw materials to be imported at lower duty rates, helping local manufacturers compete in global markets through value addition.

He also stressed the need to balance the country's strong demand for gold with the purchasing power of ordinary consumers.

Before finalising the policy, the government will review the gold policies and regulatory systems of three or four gold-exporting countries, including India. It will compare their import systems, tariff structures, stock management, export facilities and monitoring methods.

The minister asked all agencies to submit written observations on possible implementation challenges by August 9. He said another meeting would be held, if necessary, after reviewing stakeholders' feedback before the policy is finalised.



Bangladesh's gold industry has long played an important role in the economy but has remained largely outside a formal institutional framework because of inadequate policies, regulations and weak oversight, the commerce minister said.

PHOTO: STAR/FILE