

LOAD-SHEDDING CRIPPLES RURAL LIFE

During this Eid-ul-Azha vacation I spent a couple of days in two separate villages away from the capital city. During my short stays I had had first-hand experiences on how the villagers endure frequent load-shedding caused short supply of power to the Rural Electrification Board. At my Suradia village home in Munshiganj district's Sreenagar upazila I found electricity going off for hours together amid sweltering Jaishta heat. Whenever it returns it stays not for long, leaving consumers to endure not only sweat but concerns about irrigation pumps and agricultural activities. The outages

that there had recently been more disruptions in power supply obstructing smooth flow of business. The summer is really going to be difficult.

The same is not seen in Dhaka, the capital city and the seat of power. There are discriminations between the capital city and the rural Bangladesh. With peak electricity demand crossing 16,000MW on a typical summer day Bangladesh Power Development Board can supply maximum up to 14,000MW to Power Grid Company Bangladesh for distribution through the six distribution companies, including the REB, which



cause losses also to poultry farms apart from causing damages to refrigerators whoever owns the cooling appliances. The short vacation also took me and some of my friends to a restaurant close to River Padma in Dohar-Nawabganj area where we found customers and staff members struggling with on-again off-again power outages. We suffered too on a hot and humid day. Though the leave of power here was a bit short the restaurant authorities complained

bears the brunt of the short supply. The mainstream media does not provide space and time the sufferings of the villagers actually deserve. The media's coverage in this regard is discriminatory too. The Dhaka city dwellers are being spared the load-shedding as part of the government's tactic to keep them silent especially on this subject. Dhaka residents have too many problems to deal with. Rising cost of living, high fuel prices, traffic chaos and not-so-good

Reverse Swing



Farid Hossain

law and order are among the perils faced by the capital city residents. But they scream more when electricity goes off rendering refrigerators and fans idle. This is also the city where the rich, elite and the power live. Also the media sits here. So, the subsequent governments have always adopted the policy of keeping the capital city free of load-shedding. The rural people are left to suffer as they are too weak to protest. They are the voiceless people. The city people matter more than the villagers. The discrimination has been going on for many years. No doubt, it will go on.

But the economic development and the efforts to reduce poverty suffer. When the lack of electricity stops electric irrigation pumps the production of rice and vegetables get the hit. Though declining, the agriculture's contribution to Bangladesh's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is still sizeable. The sector accounts for over 11% of the GDP, which is currently \$510 billion in nominal term. But it provides employment to the country's up to 40% of the population acting as a backbone of the economy. Bangladesh suffers when its agriculture gets weak. It has been weakening over the years. In the early 1970s agriculture accounted for 38% of the GDP. In FY24-25 it declined to 1.79%, the lowest rate of growth recorded in the last 11 years, according to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. This means Bangladesh is lagging behind in its drive for economic recovery amid global fuel prices turmoil. The drive to cut down the rate of poverty is also witnessing setbacks.

Everyone everywhere requires electricity. This is citizens' rights. Political parties while seeking votes always promise a fair distribution of electricity between rural and urban residents. In practice, the rural people remain neglected. No government has ever been able to reverse this trend. 