

The Daily Star

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Dhaka is being cooked

Do city authorities have any plans to deal with heat stress from extreme temperatures?

In August this year, the country experienced a searing heat wave where the average maximum temperature turned out to be a three-decade high. Now, a study published by the Adrienne Arsht-Rockefeller Foundation Resilience Center has found that Dhaka is losing USD 6 billion worth of labour productivity each year due to heat stress from extreme temperatures. This amounts to over 8 percent of the city's annual labour output, and unless measures are taken to reduce global warming, this number could rise to 10 percent by 2050.

Out of the 12 cities compared in the study, the situation in Dhaka is the worst. While there are other cities that are more exposed to heat stress, Dhaka is especially vulnerable due to its labour-intensive economy and low rate of active cooling. So, although climate change is making the already high temperatures and humidity in Dhaka substantially worse, it seems the city authorities have done little to alleviate the situation.

According to experts, greenery and water bodies have an important impact on reducing heat stress in urban areas. However, another study recently found that Dhaka has lost around 56 percent of its green spaces over the last three decades. The circumstances are similar in terms of Dhaka's wetlands, 22 percent of which are estimated to have been lost over the span of nearly a decade. And it is not just rapid urbanisation and encroachment of natural spaces that are heating up the capital. Last month, we were reminded once again of the disturbingly high volumes of untreated waste that are flowing into the rivers of Dhaka and slowly killing them, right under the noses of the same authorities in charge of protecting them.

Equally disturbing, but perhaps not surprising, is the fact that the poorest are the biggest victims of extreme temperatures. The new study found that in informal settlements where corrugated iron sheet are used on roofs, temperatures are typically 12 degree Celsius higher than the rest of Dhaka, since these trap heat during the day and do not radiate it fast enough at night. A lack of greenery and surrounding high-rise buildings blocking wind flow only add to their sufferings.

The highest worker productivity-related economic losses, too, are felt by the poor. The study found that in sectors such as garment manufacturing, transport, and retail trade, where wages can be lower than average, losses from heat stress already amount to around 10 percent of income. These are particularly high in industries where workers are in proximity to machinery or ovens, such as garment manufacturing or brick making. All the while, the glass buildings and constant use of air-conditioning of the urban rich and white-collar industries only continue to further heat up the city.

The situation is clearly untenable, and if urgent actions are not taken, it is not only the poor who will feel its impacts; our entire urban economy will be under stress. The unplanned urbanisation of Dhaka must be curbed by all means, and the authorities must demonstrate their commitment to creating a liveable city by taking concrete steps to reduce heat stress.

A farcical campaign against drugs

Once jailed, politically linked Yaba kingpins are making a comeback

It's painful to see the manner in which the government's much-vaunted anti-drug campaign in Teknaf – which got Yaba traders to “surrender” promising not to go back to their ignoble business – has fallen flat on its face. As a report in this paper has revealed, most of these seasoned Yaba dealers (some of them godfathers) managed to get bail with their “promises” and went back to their old trade. Should we attribute this failure to the naïveté demonstrated in taking a soft approach to rein in the big fish in the Yaba business, or was this just a contrived publicity stunt all along? Either way, it's evident that the cancerous spread of this trade in Teknaf and other areas of Cox's Bazar is not going to be contained any time soon.

According to our report, around 123 top narcotics dealers surrendered to the police in 2019 after a countrywide crackdown against drugs. Among them were four brothers of a former lawmaker. Reportedly, one of the brothers, who was released on bail in 2020 on the condition that he would not return to the drug trade, was now back in the business and allegedly sheltering other drug smugglers. Another released Yaba dealer has become the chairman of Teknaf Union Parishad, but at the same time he is reportedly back in the business of drug trafficking as well. It is obvious that the involvement of politically influential individuals in the narcotics trade has made it impossible to curb, let alone end this dangerous trade.

When drug dealers become local government representatives or are family members of lawmakers, how realistic is the idea of adopting a lenient attitude to handling them or curtailing this nefarious business? How do they even become elected councillors, union parishad members or union chairmen? It is frightening to know that many of these very godfathers, with a clean chit from the police, now play a leading role in law-and-order meetings. One can only imagine the state of law and order in these areas!

At least 299 individuals were reportedly killed in so-called “gunfights” during the drive against narcotics in Cox's Bazar. These deaths have not helped to stop Yaba from entering the border points or being sold all over the country or smuggled to another country. Meanwhile, the “soft approach” to haul in drug lords has also come to naught – which casts doubt on whether the authorities are at all serious about making Cox's Bazar and other districts free from the clutches of narcotics. If they are, then they must prove it through action and put an end to the political patronage of the trade. They must remove the loopholes that allow kingpins to get away with little punishment and come back stronger and more dangerous.

Our development may be stunted by outdated data

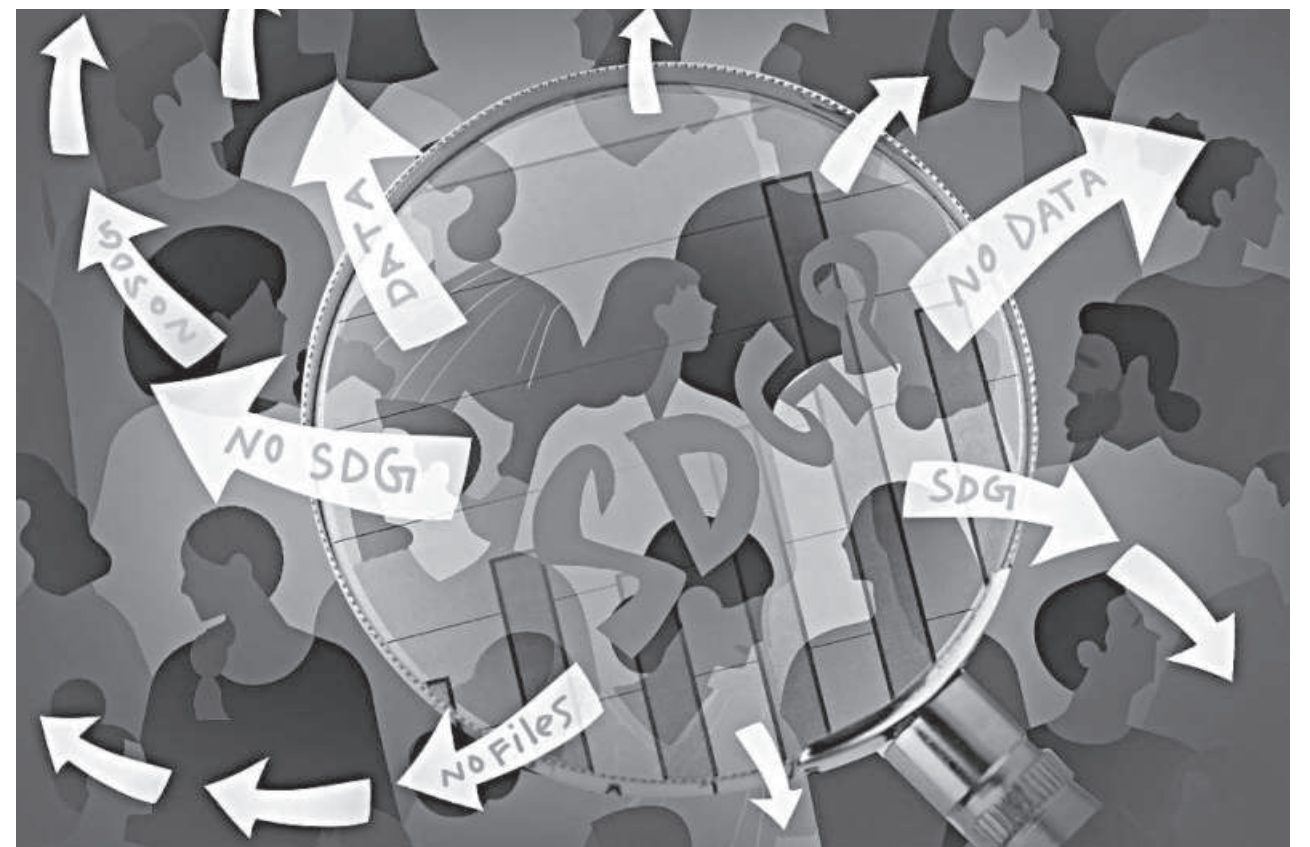


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MOHAMMAD MAINUL ISLAM

To monitor the progress and success of the unfinished agenda in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is necessary to improve the availability and quality of data on population and development. Understanding progress related to population requires that the latest, high-quality, accurate, and reliable information be available, disaggregated by factors such as income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location, and other relevant characteristics.

In Bangladesh, there is a lack of disaggregated population data for development. Almost one-third of all indicators (32.11 percent) to monitor the 17 SDGs are currently unavailable (out of 248 indicators), 31.3 percent of the indicators are in progress, and 37.4 percent are updated or readily available, according to the SDG tracker of the Bangladesh government. A few of the SDG goals are more critical in this regard. For example, Goal 12 (ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns), Goal 13 (take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts), and Goal 14 (conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources), which have more than 50 percent of indicators, have no data. More than 30 percent of indicators have no data for Goal 5 (achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), Goal 10 (reduce inequality within and among countries), Goal 11 (make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, and resilient), and Goal 15 (protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss). For Goal 3 (ensure healthy lives and promote well being for all at all ages), out of 28 indicators, 18 are updated (62.07 percent), whereas six are in progress (20.69 percent), and four have no data (13.79 percent). In the case of Goal 4 (ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all), out of 12 indicators, six are in progress (50 percent), and one has no data (8.33 percent). For Goal 6 (ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all), 21.43 percent of the indicators have updated data,



Development planning and policymaking get difficult without updated data.

VISUAL: BIPOLO CHAKROBORTY

whereas 28.57 percent are in progress, and 28.57 percent have no data.

The primary population data sources to monitor population and development planning in Bangladesh are the Bangladesh Population and Housing Census, Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics under the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), Labour Force Survey (LFS), Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS), Multiple Cluster Indicator Survey (MICS), Bangladesh Maternal and Healthcare Survey (BMHS), Bangladesh Urban Health Survey (BUHS), Violence Against Women (VAW) Survey, Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES), and others. None of these data sources are updated, except the preliminary report of the Sixth Population and Housing Census 2022. The post enumeration check (PEC) of the census, which was conducted in June, is still in progress. The BBS has not conducted adequate studies on the impact of the

and when the complete data will be available to the researchers.

In Bangladesh, the quality of the available data does not always meet expectations, and data is not always made readily available to researchers. Moreover, considerable delays in releasing detailed analytical reports may disrupt the timely production of indicators and statistical information, as well as hamper evidence-based policymaking. Hence, improving data availability and quality is necessary in the country. A systematic assessment of the population and development planning database is needed. The government should work more intensively to support capacity-building to collect the administrative data used for SDG monitoring and reporting. Data authentication, conversion to official statistics, and setting targets every five years to measure improvement are needed. For that, the government should encourage the UN agencies that concentrate many

monitoring; (v) difficulty in data collection and immediate dissemination; and (vi) lack of funding from different sources, i.e. private sector, public sector, public-private partnership, NGOs, and external financing.

We are just seven years away from the SDG deadline. It is urgent now to improve data availability and quality for population and development planning. Following the principle that no one should be left behind in the 2030 development agenda, various UN agencies can accelerate their efforts across the country. Once we get the latest information on the status of population and development indicators, it will be possible to explore how they are linked to SDG monitoring and what needs to be done to strengthen said monitoring, and what factors might assist this strengthening process. Realistically, planning is difficult without a solid database and a body of researchers who utilise and assess said database.

Volatile energy could become the norm for garment makers



RMG NOTES

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MOSTAFIZ UDDIN

As a garment maker, while the pandemic was tough going, there always seemed to be light at the end of the tunnel. Initially we saw global lockdowns which impacted our major markets in the US and European Union. But then came the vaccines and as they were being rolled out, business slowly started returning to normal and we even had a backlog of orders at one point.

The worry, at present, is that it is hard to see an end in sight as far as the energy crisis is concerned, which continues to hamper productivity in our garment industry. This crisis is causing sleepless nights for all of us with a vested interest in the success of our most important industry.

Recent estimates suggest various global issues which have led to gas shortages have hit garment production levels by up to half.

Lack of adequate gas pressure combined with soaring fuel costs means that many factories are now running at significantly lower capacity. Some factories have closed and others may follow if the situation does not ease

soon. Some factories are only running during the evening when gas pressure is consistent.

These issues all have knock-on effects, impacting the ability of factory owners to pay bank loans, salaries, rents, and so on.

As well as energy challenges, factory owners are also suffering from a lack of orders. Orders have been falling since spring and, many claim, ever since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war. The question is, why are we facing such a situation and when will it all end?

I spoke to many friends in Europe and the US to try and find some answers to these questions. Here is what I discovered.

Firstly, let's go back to early spring and the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war, which has had such a profound knock-on effect around the globe.

I do not want to get too much into the politics of the war so I will keep things simple. Nato is a defensive alliance of 30 countries from Europe and North America. While not a Nato member, Ukraine is a Nato partner.

Accordingly, Nato has consistently condemned in the strongest terms Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and has been providing Ukraine with unprecedented levels of support, helping to uphold its right to self-defence. This has included weapons and arms.

In retaliation to this, Russia – a major exporter of oil, coal and gas – has weaponised these vital energy supplies. Many Nato members have had their oil and gas supplies cut off by Russia, meaning that Europeans have seen their energy prices skyrocket beyond anything they could have imagined. This, in turn, is impacting spending power in a key market of Bangladesh. With huge gas and electric bills to pay, customers are reducing discretionary spending in things such as fast fashion.

Many American and security leaders have been telling Europe for years that they need to diversify their energy supplies and not be so dependent on Russian oil and gas. Sadly, they have not moved quickly enough and left themselves highly exposed to the energy supply squeeze being implemented by Russia.

Because supply is being squeezed, this is placing upward pressure on energy globally. This is because Russia is such an important player in the global energy market. Basic economics say if you restrict supply, prices will rise, and that is what we are continuing to see. It could be a long winter.

There is more. Many countries in the European Union have been

attempting to transition away from oil and gas towards renewable energy resources. All of this has helped create the perfect storm whereby Russia has intermittently stopped the flow of natural gas to Europe, using its dominant market position to inflict pain and uncertainty on Europe. The European Union is dependent on Russia for 46 percent of its coal imports and nearly 30 percent of its oil imports according to latest estimates.

Where will this end and what can garment makers expect in the coming months? Business associates tell me the war between Russia and Ukraine is dragging on for longer than expected. There is no sign of a ceasefire and, like so many of these wars, this has become a long, protracted battle.

The implications of all these are profound. As long as this war is raging, and as long as Nato is not willing to cede to Russia's demands (Russia wants an agreement that Ukraine will not join Nato), then energy markets globally will continue to be impacted. The effects of this will be felt even more severely as winter kicks in.

Like it or not, Bangladesh now operates in a globalised world. It is hard to see the energy challenges being experienced by our garment makers easing any time soon.

As garment makers, we need to prepare ourselves for the idea that these challenges will be here for many more months to come. The pandemic was tough but this is a different animal altogether.