



How to integrate the health sector more prominently in our national adaptation actions? PHOTO: REUTERS

# Health needs more focus in our climate actions



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In October 2022, the National Adaptation Plan of Bangladesh 2023-2050 (NAP2050) was approved. This 28-year-long plan has 113 priority interventions to combat climate change, requiring \$230 billion. This instrument not only talks about what we should do for the disaster management, social security, food and agriculture, biodiversity and water sanitation sectors, but also which policy and institutional arrangements, capacity building, research, and innovations are needed. However, one very important sector is only lightly touched upon in the NAP2050: human health.

Of course, “health” is mentioned often in the NAP2050, mostly under public health, along with water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), healthcare infrastructure, and the impact of climate change (heat and cold waves, salinity, etc) on physical and mental health, especially for the vulnerable sections of our society. Climate-resilient WASH and healthcare facilities are also referred to several times. But when the adaptation strategy framework is laid out, we don’t find human health as one of the six standalone goals of the NAP2050. Under the goal of building “climate-smart cities,” we see a strategy on developing climate-resilient healthcare and WASH facilities. Under the goal of “capacity-building and innovation,” we find a plan for research in improved health and WASH technologies. This limited focus is also reflected in the 113 priority activities, where only three mention health.

This is surprising because the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) starkly displayed the increasingly negative effects of climate change on human health. It also predicted an increase in untimely deaths, including from heat, from food-, water-, and vector-borne diseases, and mental health challenges among children, adolescents, and elderly people. The heat waves we have been facing all over the world this summer are the

latest evidence supporting these projections.

One of the reasons behind the exclusion of the health sector from the NAP2050 might be the drafting of the Bangladesh Health National Adaptation Plan (HNAP) in 2018 with support from the World Health Organization. But there is hardly any mention of the draft HNAP in the final NAP2050, except under the policies and regulations subsection where it is noted that a National Adaptation Plan for Health was being developed.

Although the draft HNAP is yet to be approved, it comprehensively focuses on health aspects of adaptation. The plan outlines 30 actions under 10 components: governance, manpower, needs assessments, surveillance, research, infrastructure, environment, programmes, preparedness, and finance. But these actions altogether needing only around \$1 million over five years (2018-2023) seems to be an underestimation.

It is true that addressing climate change is a global concern, but nations need to plan and take action as per their geographical and political contexts, too. The Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP) of 2009 or the draft Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan (MCPP) of 2021 demonstrate concerted efforts by focusing prominently on human health. As such, the limited inclusion of health in the latest NAP2050 seems to be a missed opportunity.

The coordinated system demanded by the NAP2050 will fail if we cannot reduce the gap between the health sector’s climate action and other national efforts. Also, if we look into the national budget of FY 2023-24, of the total budget for the Health Services Division (HSD), only 2.02 percent is allocated towards climate action – the fifth-lowest among 25 ministries and divisions receiving climate change allocations. It is thus difficult to understand how the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) could lead a climate adaptation process parallel to the NAP2050.

But how to integrate the health sector more prominently in our national adaptation actions? First, since a lot of effort has already been put into drafting the HNAP, it should be finalised and approved by the government as soon as possible. But before that, it must be aligned with the current strategic and operational philosophies of the government in terms of resilience building as depicted in the Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100, the Vision 2041, the MCPP, and the NAP2050. “Establish synergies with the health NAP and other aligned policies and plans” is also envisaged as a prime activity under the “policies and institutions” aspect of the NAP2050.

Second, the institutional mechanism outlined in the NAP2050 should include the MoHFW, the HSD, the Directorate General of Health Services, Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research, the Climate Change & Health Promotion Unit, the Department of Public Health Engineering, Bangladesh Medical Research Council, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University and relevant medical colleges, communicable, non-communicable and vector-borne disease control programmes, and non-governmental institutions. These health-related entities should be appropriately represented in the Inter-ministerial Steering Committee on Climate Change and the Technical Advisory Committee on climate change at the national level, and the District Development Coordination committees at the sub-national level to properly attend to the emerging health concerns of Bangladesh’s vulnerable and marginalised populations.

Finally, the health sector indeed needs an increased climate budget allocation. This could mean rebranding prevailing allocations to be linked to climate change responses, repurposing allocations based on renewed priorities, and minimising system loss. It should also be accompanied by geographical allocations targeting vulnerable rural and urban locations, based on analysing the trends of climate-induced diseases (such as the dengue endemic), shocks (for example, the recent heat waves), and stresses like salinity intrusion. Stronger surveillance is crucial in order to track changing patterns of health impacts and to promptly respond to changed situations with sufficient manpower and financial resources, and a collaboration with the Bangladesh Meteorological Department.

# Barbenheimer was insensitive, actually



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RAMISA ROB

A few days before the 78th anniversaries of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, the hashtag #NoBarbenheimer started gaining popularity in Japan, demanding an end to the most viral trend of the summer: Barbenheimer. The buzzword was created by fans on social media embracing the simultaneous releases of the two diverging blockbusters, *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer*, produced by Warner Bros and Universal Studios, respectively. It then turned into a

two major cities in Japan?

Barbenheimer has revealed a blind spot in our history-citing activism today. Persecution of civilians in conflict is on the list of topics that the current global culture deems “serious.” But somehow, the moral implications of the most grotesque bombings in history are not yet acknowledged with the same seriousness.

The memes, some AI-generated and some made by humans, include the orange hues of the nuclear

debates as to whether the bombings were war crimes committed unscrupulously as a power move in the arms race with the Soviet Union.

Some critics, on the other hand, have speculated whether the insensitivity fuels Nolan’s *Oppenheimer* itself, which did not feature the bombings from the Japanese perspective. Nolan has said that showing the bombings would “depart from *Oppenheimer*’s experience and betray the terms of storytelling.” The scientist learned about the atom bomb on the radio, and the three-hour film adopts a personal prism, portraying the mix of accomplishments and guilt that *Oppenheimer* felt regarding the consequences of what he had created. Hollywood’s tendency to create films from the perspective of White men, while demoralising the lived experiences of Asian people, is one that should be discussed. But



VISUAL: TEENI AND TUNI

media firestorm – with hashtags and memes serving as unpaid promotion for both films – and fueling a global zeitgeist that is now more exploitative than entertaining. Barbenheimer is truly the definition of overkill.

People – critics, commentators, fans, etc – apparently feel Barbenheimer marks a “cultural moment,” reviving the appeal of going to the movie theatre globally and showing how cross-marketing competing films can eschew bitter capitalist rivalry and lead to a “two is better than one” situation. It is undoubtedly a major moment in pop culture but it’s also a telling testimony regarding present culture: how toxic positivity in mainstream media drives a runaway train to regions where sensibilities are nowhere to be found.

The #NoBarbenheimer moment in Japan, where *Oppenheimer* has not yet been scheduled for release, is a valid call to take a step back and reassess what we are doing. It came about after Warner Bros retweeted a viral Barbenheimer meme, featuring Margot Robbie (as Barbie) atop the shoulders of Cillian Murphy (as J Robert Oppenheimer, the father of the atomic bomb), against a backdrop of the mushroom cloud. *Barbie*’s producers, while marketing a movie as being feminist, went on to promote co-marketing that entailed making “harmless fun” out of the first and only ever use of an atomic bomb. The Japanese subsidiary of Warner Bros, rightly, criticised this publicly as being “extremely regrettable.”

The US division did immediately issue an apology. But the fact that they egregiously embraced the tone-deaf meme as part of their marketing campaign implies two things: Hollywood’s money-making knows no boundaries, and the mass destruction in Hiroshima and Nagasaki has clearly not yet entered the laundry list of the topics of which we must be socially-aware.

We live in the age of cancel culture, where people are very “woke” and hyper-sensitive to what we can or cannot joke about. It’s not socially acceptable to make jokes about Nazis or the Holocaust or 9/11, for example. So why is it okay to make jokes about the bombing of

attacks. Some show Mattel studios with grey fumes behind them, others have pink-washed the mushroom clouds – all of which dissolves the message, or debates, offered in both films into a meaningless reincarnation of Hollywood’s sensationalist glam and glitz. Pink clouds depicting a nuclear attack will definitely not take down the patriarchy – which is the underlying theme of *Barbie*. And showing *Oppenheimer* carrying a doll on his back while the atom bomb he made explodes in the background glosses over the guilt of the scientist, and the conflict between science and

the fact is, relevant debates have faded into the background because of the craze, and people seem more interested to know if Cillian Murphy would be open to playing the role of Ken in a *Barbie* sequel.

The truth is, the reason behind the blind spot persisting till date lies in the fact that the US has not yet had a moral awakening regarding Hiroshima and Nagasaki. There is undoubtedly a deliberate amnesia regarding these existential horrors. On May 18, US President Joe Biden travelled to Hiroshima to meet with G7 leaders. He said nothing about the bombing when visiting

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politics captured in Nolan’s film.

Not to be a party-pooper, but over an estimated 200,000 Japanese civilians died in those flaming clouds; the actual number of casualties from the lingering radiation is still unknown.

There’s a fundamental issue with the concept of co-marketing a subversive satire about the world’s most popular doll with a historical biopic about the scientist who made the most destructive weapon ever used in war. *Oppenheimer* is a tricky, consequential film, grappling with a moral dilemma that still haunts US history: whether the scientists and the politicians had a real sense of the indiscriminate damage that it would cause and whether Japan would have surrendered even if the bomb had not been dropped. The official Strategic Bombing Surveys in 1946 concluded that Japan would have surrendered, leading to unresolved

the peace memorial. Neither did he meet with the survivors. Biden, who talks about atonement and thinks that coming to terms with their dark sides is what great nations do, still seems to not have come to terms with the dark history of Hiroshima-Nagasaki.

Nolan’s film ends with *Oppenheimer* telling Einstein that they’ve started a chain reaction that could destroy the world. That chain reaction is still very relevant, as the Russia-Ukraine war continues, and the US and China continue to lock horns in a new Cold War. The same “race war” between the Soviets and the US that unleashed cataclysmic power is not beyond the threats lurking in the current bottleneck geopolitical climate. So, instead of stretching the memory-hole of the bombings with Barbenheimer, it’s time for us to use this moment to learn from the worst of humanity.

## CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

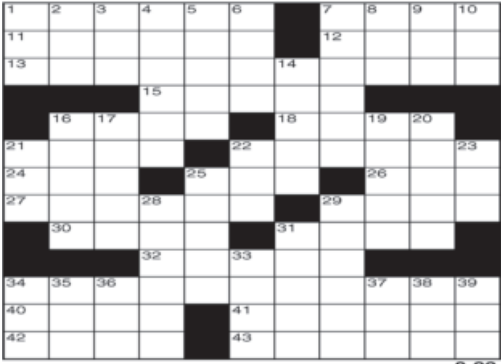
### ACROSS

- 1 Stood up to
- 7 Banana leftover
- 11 Grove fruit
- 12 Choir voice
- 13 Hall of Fame pitcher
- 15 Some tournaments
- 16 Glasgow native
- 18 Final, for one
- 21 Penniless
- 22 Church leader
- 24 Sick
- 25 Opening
- 26 2016 Olympics host
- 27 “What a shame!”
- 29 Group of believers
- 30 Snooty fellow
- 31 Feedbag fill

### DOWN

- 32 Warning sound
- 34 Hall of Fame pitcher
- 40 Corrosive stuff
- 41 Bald spot cover
- 42 Cincinnati team
- 43 Add with a caret
- 1 Uno doubled
- 2 Pitcher’s stat
- 3 Summer cooler
- 4 Like some pools
- 5 Sphinx setting
- 6 Astronaut
- 7 Takes a breather
- 8 Hobbit helper
- 9 Greek vowel
- 10 Smoked salmon

- 14 Like draft beer
- 16 Recital highlights
- 17 Two-dot character
- 19 Swagger
- 20 Works hard
- 21 Deep hole
- 22 Spot to jot
- 23 Nonsense
- 25 Roof feature
- 28 Floor makeup
- 29 College grounds
- 31 Welles of “Citizen Kane”
- 33 Opposed
- 34 Combat
- 35 Good serve
- 36 Relieve (of)
- 37 Gorilla, for one
- 38 That lass
- 39 Tennis need



## YESTERDAY’S ANSWERS

