

PM's call for urgent climate action

The world should pay heed to her appeal

We commend Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's appeal to the international community to end the senseless arms race and divert resources to combat climate change. Her statement featuring a six-point suggestion at the Munich Security Conference offers a wise strategy for the world leaders to follow against the backdrop of ongoing wars in Ukraine and Gaza that have taken thousands of lives. It is all the more relevant in a world that is far behind its targets to reduce global warming.

At the conference, the PM was upfront about her critical views on the current conflicts, especially the mindless killings of civilians in Gaza and elsewhere. We are inspired by her candour and public condemnation of these blatant human rights violations. She again called on developed countries to live up to their commitment of \$100 billion funding per year in the two years up to 2025. She asked for improving access to existing international funds by developing countries and investing in their capacity. She also gave some practical solutions to jumpstart the various aspects of climate action, such as governments investing in the right plans, and policies and instruments to mobilise private capital flows for climate action.

It is quite an achievement that the PM took the initiative to set up the Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund to undertake home-grown adaptation policies. So far, according to the PM, Bangladesh has implemented nearly 800 projects at a cost of \$480 million from its own funds. In this connection, the PM highlighted Bangladesh's vulnerability to climate change despite making negligible contribution to global emissions. She stated that Bangladesh will lose an estimated two percent from annual GDP because of climate change, and the loss can go up to nine percent if the current pace of change continues. She added that an estimated 13.3 million people in Bangladesh could be internally displaced due to its impacts. Thus, the need for developed nations to step up and provide increased funds to mitigate the effects of climate change-related disasters cannot be more urgent.

It goes without saying that climate financing must be raised with the polluting parties paying more to help the less polluting but more vulnerable parties. At the same time, all vulnerable countries eligible for these climate funds must have adequate mechanisms to make sure that these funds are used efficiently and judiciously, targeting the right people without any waste or irregularities.

Women's health must be prioritised

Study reveals worrying level of malnutrition among women

We are alarmed by the findings of a recent study that paints a worrying picture of the nutritional status of women in the country. As per the study, nearly half (45.18 percent) of women are suffering from malnutrition, with a significant portion being overweight. Malnutrition, which encompasses both undernourishment and obesity, is an issue that plagues communities worldwide. In Bangladesh, where socio-economic disparities are rampant, its impact is particularly acute, disproportionately affecting women and children.

While undernourishment is easier to understand, people often link overweight exclusively to the better-off households, which is incorrect. In fact, obesity may disproportionately affect people living in low-income communities due to them being less able to afford nutritious food, having less education to make informed choices, and having less time to engage in exercise. Irregular meals, a common factor for the poor, is also responsible. The intersectionality of poverty and malnutrition was also highlighted by the study saying that higher education levels among women and their husbands correlated with lower malnutrition rates. Moreover, the lack of access to hygienic toilet facilities also exacerbated their health risks.

The importance of recognising the different issues related to malnutrition cannot be overstated. Women and children have long been disproportionately affected by these issues. Lack of access to nutritious food—caused by the astronomical prices of commodities in our country—is well known, but lack of awareness and inherent gender bias within poorer households are not as widely recognised. Addressing these issues is crucial for improving public health as well as reducing the burden on our healthcare system. The consequences of ignoring the threat can be dire. Beyond immediate health implications, experts say, malnutrition poses significant long-term challenges for the well-being and productivity of both individuals and society.

To address this situation, concerted efforts are essential at both the policy and grassroots levels. Initiatives aimed at improving access to nutritious food, promoting health education, and enhancing sanitation infrastructure are imperative. Additionally, there should be gender-sensitive interventions that recognise the unique challenges faced by women, including their reproductive health needs and socio-economic vulnerabilities. Empowering women through education, economic opportunities, and access to healthcare services is vital to break the cycle of malnutrition and poverty.

New Message

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Preeti Urang: A child worker's death



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ANU MUHAMMAD

A recent news story has stunned us all: the death of a 15-year-old domestic worker, Preeti Urang, who fell from the eighth-floor residence of *The Daily Star's* Executive Editor Syed Ashfaqul Haque. Around six months ago, on August 6, 2023, nine-year-old Ferdousi, another domestic helper in that household, fell out of the same balcony. Even though Ferdousi did not die, she was severely injured.

These two similar incidents occurred in the house of a person employed at a newspaper that is not only one of the leading newspapers in Bangladesh, but one that expresses commitment towards upholding all kinds of human rights and is vocal against all sorts of discrimination and oppression. So, as these incidents happened at the house of one of *The Daily Star's* most senior members, they raise some serious questions.

The government continually talks about the country's impressive GDP growth, especially in the last decade or so—along with the significant rise of GDP per capita. At the same time, we have seen an increase in the number of child labourers, particularly in Dhaka, as well as the number of children begging on the streets. Most places where child labourers are being employed are dangerous. For example, we see them working daily in the transportation sector and doing other temporary work on the streets. They are found working in the most physically hazardous factories such as plastic and steel ones. They also work in small restaurants. Children are seen working on the streets of Kamalapur Railway Station, Sayedabad Bus Terminal, Sadarghat Launch Terminal, etc. Low wages, overall insecurity of life and livelihood, helplessness, lack of shelter—these are all major parts of their lives. Among these child labourers, we see girls as well. We know that these child labourers don't have a place to stay, enough to eat, secure families, and are often victims of sexual harassment and human trafficking. They are even used as instruments in the drug trafficking business.

So, what is the reason behind so many children working or living on the streets? It is because a large portion of the Bangladeshi population cannot afford to sustain their families or their lives financially, while living with their children. People's income levels are so low that they cannot eat properly and take care of their children. Families are breaking apart looking for sources of income to sustain lives. The main

victims of this are children. They are being scattered and separated from their parents.

A lot of these children are admitted to schools early on. But after perhaps Class 5 or 6, they cannot continue their studies anymore because they are sent somewhere for work. As their parents can no longer bear their financial responsibilities, it is the parents who send these children away. We know about the Hashem Foods factory incident a few years back—which caught fire, leading to 54 workers being killed. After seeing



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Individuals form a human chain in front of The Daily Star Centre over the death of Preeti Urang on Thursday.

the government's usual dilly-dallying, we formed a public inquiry committee and found that most of the workers in that factory were child labourers, aged between 14 and 16 years. They all used to go to school, but had to stop going because their parents could not bear their living or educational expenses. The wages they were being paid were also significantly low. The children were killed because the factory did not have sufficient safety measures in place.

Many people in the country advocate against child labour. There are also national and international laws that are supposed to protect them. But due to the core reasons mentioned, child labour could not be eradicated. These children don't go to work willingly; they work in order to survive. So, to stop child labour, the general living standards have to be

and spend time with other children. Often, they cannot bear the slave-like work pressure and torture of their employers; sometimes they try to run away.

We can look back at the story of Yasmin in 1995, who used to work in Dhaka. At one point, out of frustration, she tried to run away, back to her home in Dinajpur. Before reaching her mother, when she got off the bus near her home, some policemen picked her up in a police vehicle. She was a child, around 14 years old. Yasmin was raped and murdered. This resulted in a huge protest. Yasmin is a symbol of how dreadful the situation can be for child workers. Even when they try to run away, be saved from torture, or even go back to their families, they can still become victims.

In the case of Preeti Urang's death,

no justice has been served for her. That is why the role of *The Daily Star* itself, along with citizens, writers, and other organisations which have a commitment in this regard, is crucial. There should be protests, and a strong stance should be taken against such incidents. *The Daily Star* must make its position transparent. It has a good record of doing in-depth investigations, so why not here? *The Daily Star* has a big responsibility to investigate what happened, to find out who is responsible for this incident, and to take a strong position against them. If *The Daily Star* fails to take the right position in this case, it will lead to a huge credibility crisis for the whole organisation. We stand for Preeti, we want justice, and we cannot provide any concessions to those responsible for her suffering and the untimely end of her life.

On the 2024 farmers' protest in India



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PALLAB BHATTACHARYA

Thousands of farmers from Punjab and Haryana have taken to the streets again, just over two years after their previous year-long agitation had hogged the national and international media's attention. In the fresh spell of the agitation, christened "Delhi Chalo," that began on the Punjab-Haryana border on February 13, the farmers smashed through police barricades but faced teargas shells, including those dropped from drones, on their way to the capital. The next day, the farmers, in a novel measure, sent hundreds of kites up in the sky to counter the drones. At the Khanauri border point, Haryana police charged with batons against the farmers and a number of them were detained, their vehicles seized at the Shambhu border.

The main demand of the farmers is the enactment of a law to guarantee minimum support prices (MSP) for 23 crops as per the formula proposed by a commission headed by late agronomist Dr MS Swaminathan, considered the father of India's green revolution. This issue was agreed on during the multiple rounds of talks between

farmers and the Modi government in 2021. Accordingly, a 23-member committee of experts, representatives of farmers' unions, and the government was set up for threadbare discussion on legal guarantees for MSP and other demands. Among the other key demands by the farmers are waiver of their debts and withdrawal of cases registered against them during the 2020-21 agitation.

The BJP is not oblivious to the fact that the Modi government had to finally bow before the 2021 agitation by scrapping the three controversial farm laws. That was due to the party's anxiety over spillover of the agitation in Punjab, Haryana, and western Uttar Pradesh. This time, the last thing the BJP wants is for farmers to stir snowballs so close to fresh Lok Sabha elections. Seeking to minimise possible damage, the Modi government has deputed three senior ministers to negotiate with the farmers. But the two rounds of talks already held are yet to lead to a solution.

There is recognition in the party that the agitation, if allowed to go on,

would hurt it electorally in Punjab, where 13 Lok Sabha seats are at stake. The BJP has never been a key player in Punjab, either in assembly or Lok Sabha elections. It remains to be seen how the farmers' stir of 2021 and 2024 impact the upcoming national poll, especially in BJP-ruled UP, which has the highest number of 80 Lok Sabha seats. BJP succeeded in preventing UP regional party Rashtriya Lok Dal from drifting to the opposition camp by entering a tie-up with it. The RLD has a support base among Jat farmers in Meerut belt. It may not be entirely coincidental that the Modi government's decision to confer India's highest civilian honour Bharat Ratna on RLD leader Jayant Singh's grandfather, late Chaudhary Charan Singh—a Jat farmer who was India's prime minister for six months—was as much political messaging as recognising individual contribution.

The main difference between the farmers' stir in 2021 and this time is that the previous agitation had raged for a year at the doorsteps of Delhi—at the borders Delhi shares with Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, to be precise—as the farmers were not halted on their way from Punjab, Haryana, and UP. This time around, the farmers had a free passage in AAP-ruled Punjab and were stopped at the border with Haryana ruled by the same BJP government which did not foil the agitators in 2021. Another feature of the current agitation is that it is led by two separate farmers' outfits, Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh

Committee and Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political); the second being a breakaway group of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) which had led the 2021 movement.

The farmers' agitation has reignited the debate over the necessity or otherwise of the legal cover for MSP. The opinions remain as sharply divergent as ever. The Congress dispensation headed by Manmohan Singh had turned down Swaminathan committee's recommendation for MSP that was at least 50 percent higher than the weighted average cost of production, arguing that it would distort the crop market. "A mechanical linkage between MSP and cost of production may be counter-productive in some cases," KV Thomas, who was then the minister of state for agriculture and food, had said in response to a question by former BJP lawmaker Prakash Javadekar in parliament in 2010. Thomas had said the government favoured the Commission on Agricultural Costs and Prices recommended MSP based on "objective criteria and considering a variety of factors." The Modi government has argued the legal backing for MSP needs to be deliberated in detail before a final decision is taken. The crux of the debate remains the same: while the government can provide legal guarantees for the crops it procures, can the same be extended to private players who would prefer to buy foodgrain at prices determined by demand-supply forces?