

## Christmas terror for Tripura community

### Bring criminals to book, help arson victims rebuild lives

We are deeply disturbed by the arson attack on the minority Tripura community in Lama, Bandarban, in which 17 homes were reportedly reduced to ashes on Christmas Eve. Seemingly rooted in local disputes over land, the assault reflects a disturbing trend of exploitation and impunity that has often endangered the lives and properties of minorities in Bangladesh. The symbolism of this incident—occurring on what should have been a day of joy—is also chilling, and heartbreaking, underscoring the urgency of acting decisively to ensure the safety of minorities.

One may recall a similar attack on December 3, when a mob targeted Hindu residents at Manglargaon village in Sunamganj, following allegations of blasphemy against a young Hindu man who apparently posted an offensive comment about Islam on Facebook. Despite his arrest under the Cyber Security Act, the mob ransacked about 40 houses, several shops, and temples. In Lama, the victims happened to be Christian. According to a report, the attack occurred at the Notun Tongjihiri Tripura Para of Sarai union when the families were attending Christmas prayers and celebrations in a neighbouring village due to the absence of a local church. There were 19 bamboo-and-thatch houses; of them, only two were left unscarred when the families rushed back upon hearing the news. As of writing this editorial, the authorities have yet to arrest any perpetrators, although an FIR has been filed.

Locals say the Tripura community had lived in the area for generations before being forcibly evicted a few years ago by individuals claiming that the land had been leased to the wife of former IGP Benazir Ahmed. After the fall of the Awami League regime on August 5, the evicted families returned to rebuild their homes, only to lose them again, highlighting a troubling intersection of political influence, land rights, and minority vulnerabilities. It's evident that land disputes—long a source of tensions in the Chittagong Hill Tracts—are still being used as a pretext for violence against Indigenous communities. The Sunamganj attack, on the other hand, highlights how religious sensitivities can be exploited to incite such violence. In many cases, such incidents are orchestrated by vested interests for personal or political gain.

We urge the authorities to thoroughly investigate the Lama attack and bring the perpetrators to justice. Swift, visible action is particularly important in light of the ongoing disinformation campaign about the safety of minorities in Bangladesh. Moreover, the authorities must extend comprehensive support to the victims so that they can rebuild their homes and lives. The assistance provided so far—two blankets and one sack of rice per family—is grossly inadequate, and so must be enhanced. Given the vulnerabilities of Indigenous communities in CHT, it is also crucial to strengthen the institutional framework for protecting their rights, especially land rights.

## Ensure inmates' health rights

### Investigate AL leaders' deaths in Bogura jail custody

The deaths of four pre-trial inmates associated with Awami League, allegedly from heart attacks, within just 29 days while in the custody of Bogura District Jail have understandably raised concerns. According to a report by *Samakal*, the Bogura district administration has formed an inquiry committee to investigate the deaths after the families of the deceased accused jail authorities of negligence. The four deceased—Shahidul Islam Ratan, 58; Abdul Latif, 67; Shahadat Alam Jhunu, 57; and Abdul Matin Mithu, 65—died on November 11, 25, 26, and December 9, respectively. On Wednesday, another inmate, former Awami League MP Ragebul Ahsan Ripu, also suffered a cardiac arrest before he was transferred to the National Heart Institute in Dhaka.

Bogura jail authorities have attributed the deaths to pre-existing conditions and stress from the new environment. They also insisted that all of the deceased were “seniors”, and that they were not “tortured or neglected.” However, the fact that the prison’s permanent medical officer position remains vacant is telling. A doctor from the civil surgeon’s office is usually summoned when an inmate’s condition becomes critical. Following those deaths, however, a doctor reportedly visits the prison regularly—a step that should have been standard practice long ago.

In this column, we have often emphasised the importance of upholding prisoners’ rights, including access to proper medical care. Regardless of the charges or convictions, every prisoner is entitled to adequate healthcare. The responsibility lies squarely with the state to ensure access to medication, timely medical attention, and qualified physicians. Yet, in our overcrowded prison system—housing over 90,000 inmates with only six doctors against 141 sanctioned posts—this right is too often neglected. The issue is being compounded by inadequate security measures, particularly for AL leaders being taken to hospitals for medical tests or court trials. Such shortcomings jeopardise not only the prisoners’ health and safety but also the credibility of ongoing legal proceedings after the mass uprising.

If the health of a pre-trial detainee deteriorates due to the subhuman conditions of our prisons, it effectively serves as a premature and unjust punishment for someone yet to be proven guilty. We hope the Bogura inquiry committee will deliver its report soon and hold to account those responsible for any negligence. At the same time, we urge the government to undertake systemic reforms—including by addressing issues like overcrowding, insufficient medical staff, and poor infrastructure—to ensure the rights of inmates and prevent further tragedies. A just society is measured by how it treats its most vulnerable members, including those behind bars.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

### Dutch transfer of Indonesian sovereignty

On this day in 1949, four years after nationalist revolutionary leader Sukarno had declared Indonesia's independence, formal sovereignty over the country was transferred from the Dutch to the United States of Indonesia.

# Why the energy and power master plan must be reviewed

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The Integrated Energy and Power Master Plan (IEPMP) of Bangladesh, aiming to outline a strategy for the country’s energy and power sector up to 2050, was approved in 2023. In addition to the overall supply and demand scenario in the sector, this document outlines the role of renewable energy and clean energy in the electricity mix for the planning period. This forecast of the electricity mix has updated the Power System Master Plan of 2016, where the role of renewable energy was kept at a minimum. Projecting that renewable energy and other modern clean energy sources will play a bigger role in the country’s power mix, the IEPMP outlines three different scenarios: reference scenario (REF), advanced technology scenario (ATS), and net-zero scenario (NZS). The plan forecasts that in the ATS and NZS, contributions from solar and wind technologies will be substantial, there will be an expansion of nuclear capacity, coal-fired power plants will be converted to ammonia co-firing, gas will be replaced by hydrogen, carbon capture and storage (CCS) technology will be incorporated, and oil and captive power will be minimised.

However, the projections of introduction of future technologies and their prices have been challenged by various research. The assumptions about the costs and feasibilities of renewables and their prices relative to fossil fuels are based on past trends, which may not continue into the future. The development of renewable energy is still in the early stages in Bangladesh, but it is gaining momentum exponentially. The estimates of the costs and prices of renewable energy technologies in the IEPMP do not reflect actual current values for Bangladesh. Moreover, the forecasts of fossil fuel generation shares are based on the price forecast of fossil fuels up to 2041 by the International Energy Agency (IEA). IEA forecasts have been proven wrong in the past; the current prices of fossil fuels like gas and coal can rise to several orders of magnitude greater than the forecasted prices due to the global changes in energy markets and international political developments, like wars. The IEA projections of the growth and costs of solar PV and wind energy have also been grossly underestimated. The impact of fossil fuel price increases on foreign exchange reserves and inflation and the consequent impact on macroeconomic variables have not been anticipated, but recent developments in the Bangladesh economy have revealed that these are crucial considerations.

According to the IEPMP, the share of fossil fuels is to decrease to at least 60 percent by 2041 and at least 45 percent by 2050 in the Advanced Technology Scenario, and clean energy is supposed to make up the balance. However, per the plan, clean energy includes not only solar and wind, but also nuclear, hydrogen, ammonia co-firing with coal, and CCS technology incorporated into fossil fuel power plants. For example, it is projected that towards 2050, the

ratio of wind power and hydrogen-fired thermal power in the power mix will increase, amounting to 15 percent and 16 percent, respectively. This type of projection implies a role for fossil fuels to remain in use in the future, with provisions to mitigate their polluting effect through still technologically or commercially unproven technologies like ammonia co-firing and CCS. It has been mentioned that CCS, nuclear and hydro will be the chief sources of clean energy, as there are limited wind and solar resources

wind and solar in Bangladesh, but no such studies have been done about hydrogen. The potential to make more land available for solar projects has been extensively discussed in policy documents such as the climate prosperity plan, the draft National Solar Energy Roadmap 2021-2041 (SREDA), and also in some academic research. Here, rooftop solar, solar irrigation and various land reclamation strategies are discussed, in order to allocate more land for solar projects. Furthermore, strategies to accommodate



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

in the country and limited land for developing solar power plants. The share of solar and wind are projected to remain below 20 percent even in 2050.

The IEPMP plans an energy mix with yet unproven technologies, like liquid hydrogen and ammonia. And yet, the share of variable renewable energy in the final energy mix is projected to be small (less than 20 percent). Hydrogen ends up having a significant share in electricity production installed capacity (around 22.4 percent by 2050 of PP2041 scenario). This is unexpected, as hydrogen is a much less mature technology for electricity production and is currently not applied globally on a commercial scale, whereas solar and wind constitute significant shares of electricity generation in many countries. The IEPMP projects that ammonia co-firing at coal-fired thermal plants will start from 2035 and will reach significant levels in the electricity mix by 2040. However, if this plan is to be realised, Bangladesh will have to become a pioneer in using ammonia co-firing in the power sector to such a large extent, as the plan to incorporate ammonia into the electricity generation mix is perhaps unprecedented in other countries (REN21, 2022). At present, the ammonia co-firing technology remains at the research level and is limited to demonstration projects (IRENA, 2022).

Although it is mentioned that solar and wind have limited scope for expansion due to the variable nature of the power as well as the scarcity of land in Bangladesh, there is no discussion to prove how hydrogen can be obtained at such a high quantity to comprise more than a fifth of the total installed capacity of electricity generation. Some research has been done on the potential to incorporate more

variable renewables are also discussed, including storage capacity installation, sector coupling, transmission networks and demand response management. Storage and demand response management are already proven technologies and are commercially viable (REN21, 2022). Yet, such promising and emerging technologies are conspicuously absent in the IEPMP. There is only a brief proposal to perform a feasibility study for pumped storage in Bandarban, where the capacity is insignificant in comparison to Bangladesh's needs, and there is no discussion of using grid-tied battery storage.

The IEPMP goals do not reflect the targets of Bangladesh's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), nor the SDG 7 on clean energy access. The pace and direction of energy technology is changing fast, and new disruptive technologies like artificial intelligence and smart grid are evolving. The future may, therefore, bring many new opportunities and threats, which will involve the power and energy sector of a country. Hence, a power sector master plan like the IEPMP should be forward-thinking, dynamic and adaptive and should also follow the world trends.

The power sector has been undergoing a review in Bangladesh with a view to eliminating financial and technological inefficiencies. The interim government recently said it was revising the IEPMP and reevaluating the renewable energy policy. This is indeed a step in the right direction. The revision must reflect the new financial and technological realities and chart a realistic pathway for the country's power and energy sector.

# For a climate-resilient urban future, we need empowered women



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Bangladesh, as a low-lying deltaic country with a high density population of over 17 crore, faces severe impacts of climate change such as rising sea levels, increased flooding, and more frequent natural disasters. These challenges disproportionately affect women, who comprise over half of the population and face compounded vulnerabilities due to poverty, gender inequality, and limited resources.

Women are generally more vulnerable to climate change than men because they make up the majority of Bangladesh's poor, with over 50 percent of women living below the national poverty line. Moreover, their vulnerability is exacerbated due to existing gender inequalities and socioeconomic factors. Women are particularly impacted in urban slums and informal settlements, where inadequate infrastructure, poor sanitation, and lack of essential services exacerbate their struggles.

According to certain studies, women are more likely to migrate than men due to the loss of livelihoods, food insecurity, and lack of adaptation options in their villages. The communities migrate to urban settlements, and this is not new: a major influx occurred after the cyclones in 1970 and 1991, Cyclone

Sidr in 2007, Cyclone Aila in 2009, and post floods. Yet, we struggle to find a clear plan for developing infrastructures and services in the cities/urban settings, which is why we find inadequate temporary shelters in the cities.

Climate change drives migration from rural to urban areas, stressing urban resources and infrastructure. This scenario is true not only in Dhaka but also in Chattogram, Khulna and Gazipur, to name a few cities. Women, often engaged in low-wage labour, face wage discrimination, health issues, malnutrition, and inadequate access to healthcare, particularly during pregnancy. The lack of safe water, sanitation, and affordable menstrual hygiene products further compounds their difficulties. Men in these settings also suffer from poor mental health, malnutrition, and drug addiction, indirectly impacting women's burdens.

On a strategic level, decision-makers and political experts have to pay attention to experts who have suggested that to avoid the worst impacts of climate change, we have to put an end to new fossil fuel projects. Reports have highlighted that the fossil fuel industry is exploiting women in low-income countries, violating their rights and causing

unimaginable climate destruction. These negative impacts will continue unless countries like Bangladesh, from the LDC group, and small nation states work collectively for a just transition to renewable energy pathways.

It is important to remind ourselves that adaptation strategies and pathways will not work unless global leadership is serious about meeting

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the emission reduction target. In 2024, the average global temperature rise has already been perilously close to an increase of 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. As things stand, current emissions reduction commitments put the world on track for a global temperature rise of 2.6-2.8 degrees Celsius this century, and the actions needed to meet these commitments are insufficient. An urgent phase-out of fossil fuels is essential to keep global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

In urban spaces, heat-related issues have become a major concern as the poor have limited resources and knowledge to deal with it. Efforts at a national level to address these issues must include gender-responsive climate adaptation pathways. Urban institutions and authorities need to be empowered, decentralised, and provided with a separate budget to serve their constituencies. First and foremost, the policymakers require disaggregated data.

Empowering women through education, resource access, and participation in decision-making processes enhances community resilience. Policies like the Bangladesh Climate Change and Gender Action Plan (CCGAP) provide frameworks to integrate gender considerations, but they require improved implementation and monitoring. Women's leadership in local governance and climate initiatives, such as women-led emergency response groups and Reflect Circles at community levels, demonstrates the potential for inclusive and effective disaster response. Sustainable solutions demand gender-sensitive urban planning, enhanced access to climate finance, and community-based interventions to build resilience and equity.

It is critical to enhance and increase access of women, youth, and marginalised communities to climate finance, DRR and humanitarian funding, including by supporting women's organisations to access funding from national and international funding bodies and other multilateral mechanisms generally and those focusing on urbanisation and development.