

## In revising DAP, resist real-estate pressure

Proposed amendments will worsen Dhaka's liveability, experts say

At a time when the capital is already struggling with overpopulation and congestion, experts have reacted with scepticism to the move to revise the Detailed Area Plan (DAP) of Dhaka—saying it will worsen the city's liveability rather than improve it. The Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) drafted the amendment proposal after real estate developers intensified protests against DAP-2022 following last year's political changeover. And it has been recently discussed at the first meeting of a high-powered evaluation committee that decided to seek stakeholders' input before any decision.

While talking to this daily, several urban planners said the proposed amendments, driven largely by demands from real estate developers, would further increase the city's population density and aggravate its living conditions. If approved, it will allow developers to increase building heights by two to four stories as well as floor area in most neighbourhoods. As a result, some areas could see their population rise to an alarming 50,000 per square kilometre. Experts particularly objected to the proposed change to the Floor-Area Ratio (FAR). The DAP currently has an area-based FAR system to ensure a gradual decrease in FAR from central to peripheral areas, maintaining some balance in urban expansion. Although it had been relaxed in 2023, under pressure from real estate businesses, the new draft now suggests changing the FAR approval system to a uniform plot-and-road-based one, making way for indiscriminate high-rise construction. Such modifications, argues one expert, will "undermine the unique character of different neighbourhoods, disrupt urban balance, and risk the destruction of residential communities in Dhaka."

These warnings deserve to be taken seriously for the sake of the safety and wellbeing of residents. Allowing more high-rises without proper planning may not only worsen traffic congestion and overstretch public utilities, but also increase environmental hazards in a city already seeing the worst of them. The risk of fire hazards in high rises along narrow roads is another serious concern, especially with the current lack of fire prevention measures. As urban planners have pointed out, it is also essential that setback distances between buildings are strictly enforced to ensure proper sunlight, ventilation, and overall safety.

We, therefore, urge the interim government to resist the pressure from real estate developers. As the city expands, so too must its planning standards, supporting infrastructure, and regulatory enforcement to ensure a liveable Dhaka. While the existing DAP is far from ideal, any changes to it should be guided by established urban planning principles, not the profit motives of a few. Given the state it has reached, we should also focus on reducing pressure on Dhaka by decentralising development.

## Sundarbans' climate migrants need help

They must not be left to suffer at home or abroad

We are concerned about the plight of climate migrants who are forced to seek livelihoods abroad, particularly in the Gulf countries, owing to poverty, debt, and persistent threats of climate-induced disasters in Bangladesh. Far from delivering desired relief, their desperate attempts often turn into another harsh ordeal, as many are forced to return after enduring wage theft, exploitative working conditions, and even deprivation of basic necessities like food in host countries. A significant number of such migrants are from climate-vulnerable regions such as the Sundarbans, Satkhira, and Khulna.

Reportedly, climate-related disasters in Bangladesh have nearly doubled over the past six decades, increasing from four per year before 1990 to seven per year after. The frequency and severity of such calamities have further increased after cyclones Sidr in 2007 and Aila in 2009, intensifying migration both within the country and beyond. According to BMET data, international migration from the Sundarbans region increased by 65 percent in a single year, with 786 people moving abroad for work between October 2022 and September 2023, compared to 477 the previous year. Despite that, their financial conditions have remained unchanged.

The picture that emerges from a study by the Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Program (OKUP)—highlighting the experience of returnee migrants belonging to the Sundarbans region—is quite depressing even if familiar. Many have reported suffering withheld salaries, excessive work hours, restricted movement due to confiscation of passports or lack of work permits, and exorbitant recruitment fees. Many were detained by police and deported directly from jail. Their unexpected return without adequate earnings has only deepened their debt burdens instead of easing them. Another recent survey found that nearly every migrant from Bangladesh's climate-affected regions has experienced some form of modern slavery while abroad. This alarming situation demands immediate government interventions, including the creation of adequate local jobs and other income-generating opportunities for climate-vulnerable communities.

The rights and well-being of these inherently vulnerable individuals deserve priority from the authorities. They must actively engage with foreign embassies to safeguard our migrant workers and ensure they are not subjected to exploitation. Also, the authorities must better regulate migration costs and crack down on unscrupulous recruitment agencies preying on desperate job seekers. Over the years, countless workers have faced abuse while abroad, many even losing their lives. This, too, needs to change. The government must take decisive action to address these interlinked issues and uphold the rights of our migrant workers.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

### Dominion of Canada created

On this day in 1867, with the British North America Act, the British colonies of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Canada were united as the Dominion of Canada, and the province of Canada was separated into Quebec and Ontario.

# BIMSTEC must adapt to global shifts and future challenges



Dr Selim Raihan  
is professor in the Department of Economics  
at the University of Dhaka and executive  
director of the South Asian Network on  
Economic Modeling (SANEM). He can be  
reached at selim.raihan@econdu.ac.bd.

SELIM RAIHAN

The sixth Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) summit will be held in Bangkok, Thailand, from April 2-4. The New World Order, which denotes an evolving geopolitical landscape characterised by shifting power dynamics, technological advancements, and interconnectedness, necessitates BIMSTEC to adopt a novel approach to regional cooperation.

One major challenge is the escalation of uncertainty, a notable trend in the global trade regime. The undermining of multilateralism poses a significant threat to the WTO's rule-based system, creating an unpredictable environment for international trade. Additionally, geopolitical realignments, such as the US-China and US-Canada trade wars, alongside Trump's reciprocal tariff, highlight the shifting dynamics and rivalries in global trade. These developments drive trade diversification and regionalisation, exemplified by the "China+" strategy.

Protectionism is on the rise, too, with tariffs, non-tariff measures, and trade restrictions becoming increasingly prevalent. Supply chain innovation is also transforming global trade as automation, AI, and ethical supply chains gain prominence. The rise of the Global South signifies another important trend, with India, ASEAN, and Africa assuming an increasingly vital role in the global economy.

Furthermore, digital commerce is experiencing substantial growth, driven by the expansion of e-commerce, blockchain technology, and AI-enabled logistics. Additionally, the green trade agenda is gaining momentum, with a focus on climate and renewable energy trade, reflecting a growing commitment to sustainability within global trade practices.

Meanwhile, conflicts, terrorism, and cyber threats across national boundaries are making international cooperation essential. Furthermore, rapid advancements in artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and digital infrastructure present significant opportunities alongside ethical, security, and regulatory challenges.

Rising sea levels, extreme weather, and resource shortages are also impacting all countries, including

those in the BIMSTEC region. Besides, the Covid pandemic has underscored the vulnerability of health systems worldwide, highlighting the need for preparedness, equitable vaccine distribution, and coordinated pandemic response—areas where many BIMSTEC nations fall short. Despite economic progress, poverty remains a challenge in many regions within BIMSTEC countries. Bridging economic disparities and fostering inclusive growth are crucial for both global stability and regional prosperity.

Moreover, macroeconomic instability in several BIMSTEC nations hinders efforts to reduce poverty and build resilience.

as it emphasises physical, digital, and interpersonal connectivity. By enhancing transport links, energy grids, digital infrastructure, and technological partnerships, BIMSTEC can drive economic growth and resilience.

BIMSTEC can also bolster health systems, facilitate the exchange of best practices, and improve preparedness. Additionally, collaborative efforts within the organisation can effectively tackle climate change, disaster risk reduction, and sustainable resource management.

Despite numerous promises and its 27 years of existence, BIMSTEC's progress toward deeper regional integration has remained limited. Several factors continue to hinder its advancement.

One significant obstacle is the lack of political commitment from the leaders of member countries. Larger nations have not consistently demonstrated the political will required to push the agenda forward, while smaller nations have not prioritised BIMSTEC sufficiently. For instance, it took 25

boosting investments are vital for improving economic integration within the BIMSTEC region. Although physical connectivity and trade volumes have improved, intra-regional trade remains limited (around seven percent). While this outpaces the performance of SAARC countries, it lags significantly behind ASEAN (approximately 25 percent). Additionally, the region suffers from a substantial infrastructure investment gap (estimated at \$120 billion annually), hindering smooth economic collaboration.

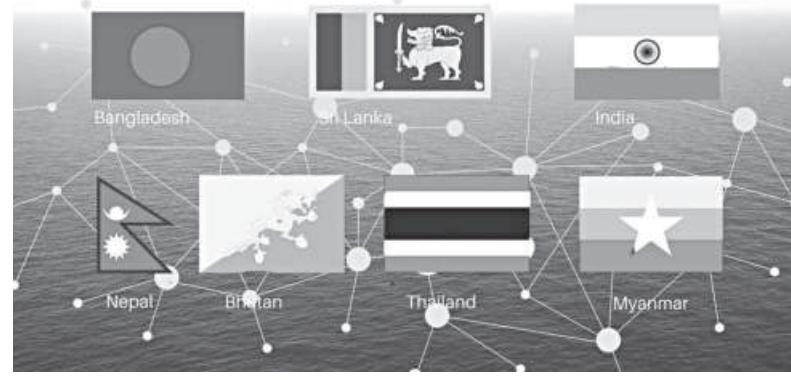
Although the framework agreement was signed in 2004, BIMSTEC has yet to establish a comprehensive free trade agreement (FTA). Instead, member countries have individually entered into numerous bilateral and multilateral trade agreements, resulting in fragmented trade arrangements.

Scepticism about the FTA among larger BIMSTEC nations raises doubts about its future progress. Historically, disputes over sensitive lists, reluctance to fully open economies, and non-tariff issues have impeded FTA prospects. Furthermore, bilateral tensions, such as those between Bangladesh and Myanmar, negatively affect BIMSTEC's effectiveness. Additionally, nations like Thailand and Myanmar often prioritise ASEAN over BIMSTEC due to ASEAN's advanced integration framework.

The BIMSTEC Secretariat operates with limited financial resources, severely curtailing its ability to implement projects, organise events, and facilitate effective cooperation among member countries. Inadequate funding also constrains its capacity to attract skilled personnel, affecting overall efficiency. Resource shortages further undermine the Secretariat's visibility both regionally and globally, impeding advocacy, outreach, and communication of BIMSTEC's goals.

Despite its potential, BIMSTEC faces challenges in fostering stronger people-to-people interactions among its member countries. To address these issues, initiatives such as educating youth about BIMSTEC's significance, investing in cross-border infrastructure, and enhancing digital connectivity are essential. These efforts can help build closer ties, encourage mutual understanding, and promote trust—ultimately strengthening regional cooperation.

In conclusion, BIMSTEC holds immense potential to shape the New World Order by fostering cooperation, building resilience, and advancing sustainable development in the Bay of Bengal region. However, its effectiveness depends on collective commitment, practical initiatives, and the flexibility to adapt to evolving global challenges.



VISUAL: MONOROM POLOK

BIMSTEC, comprising seven countries around the Bay of Bengal (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand), holds immense potential for addressing modern challenges through effective regional cooperation. The region's geographical proximity and historical ties provide a unique platform for collaboration, bridging South Asia and Southeast Asia. BIMSTEC prioritises areas such as trade, investment, connectivity, and cooperation to strengthen economic ties, alleviate poverty, and promote sustainable development.

Recognising the threats of terrorism and transnational organised crime, BIMSTEC member states can collaborate through coordinated efforts and information sharing

years for BIMSTEC to adopt a formal Charter, delaying institutionalisation and slowing decision-making processes. Furthermore, translating commitments into tangible actions demands sustained effort. BIMSTEC must focus on implementing projects and diligently monitoring their outcomes.

Creating a unified security framework is crucial, particularly in addressing unconventional threats such as cyber-attacks and climate-induced migration. BIMSTEC should involve civil society, academic institutions, and the private sector to adopt a holistic approach. Integrating gender perspectives and actively engaging youth are equally important.

Enhancing trade facilitation, reducing non-tariff barriers, and

# Our coastal communities need a climate justice plan



Md. Al-Mamun  
is researcher and social scientist at the Brac Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD).

MD. AL-MAMUN

Last year, the United Nations issued a "red alert" for the future of the world due to the escalating impacts of climate change. The "red alert" highlighted the unprecedented record-breaking heat and extreme weather events, signalling the urgency of addressing the climate crisis. Bangladesh, being one of the most vulnerable countries, is facing the brunt of this crisis, with rising sea levels and extreme weather events threatening its coastal communities. Coastal areas are not only at risk of disappearing beneath rising seas but are also witnessing an acceleration of cyclonic activity, salinity intrusion, and the collapse of vital ecosystems. It is high time that the world, particularly the developed nations most responsible for climate emissions, recognise the necessity of climate justice for the vulnerable communities whose homes are under threat.

Bangladesh's coastal areas are particularly susceptible to the consequences of climate change. According to the Bangladesh Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience Fund (BCCARF), sea level rise could displace up to 20 million people by 2050, primarily from Bangladesh's coastal zones. The World Bank's projections paint a similarly grim

picture, stating that Bangladesh's coastline, home to some of the most impoverished and marginalised populations, faces devastating threats from climate-related disasters.

This catastrophe is made even more unfair by the fact that Bangladesh, with its negligible contribution to global carbon emissions, bears the heaviest toll. The irony is palpable: countries like the United States, China, and members of the European Union, who are the largest emitters of greenhouse gases, are largely unaffected by the climate disasters wreaking havoc in Bangladesh's coastal regions.

Climate justice is not just an ethical concept; it's a necessity for the survival of the most vulnerable populations. In Bangladesh, it means ensuring that those most affected by climate change, who have contributed the least to its cause, receive the support they need to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of the crisis.

Climate justice must be seen as both distributive and procedural. Distributive justice refers to the fair allocation of resources to those most in need. In the case of Bangladesh, this means ensuring that the country receives adequate climate finance to implement adaptive measures, build

resilient infrastructure, and protect vulnerable populations from the escalating impacts of climate change. This financial support should be sourced from countries historically responsible for the majority of carbon emissions. These nations must not only reduce their emissions but also provide the necessary compensation to protect vulnerable nations like Bangladesh.

Procedural justice, on the other hand, demands that those most affected by climate change—especially marginalised communities, have a say in the decision-making processes surrounding climate action. In Bangladesh, women, indigenous groups, and low-income communities must be included in climate discussions at all levels, from local to international. Their voices and local knowledge are vital in creating solutions that are both effective and culturally appropriate.

To truly achieve climate justice for Bangladesh's coastal communities, we need both global and local action. At the international level, countries responsible for high emissions must fulfil their financial commitments under the Paris Agreement, ensuring that Bangladesh receives sufficient climate financing to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change. The funds allocated should be directed toward the most vulnerable regions, focusing on projects that prioritise both resilience and equity.

At the national level, Bangladesh must continue to strengthen its disaster management systems and promote policies that prioritise climate resilience for marginalised communities. But it is equally important to ensure that local communities are not just recipients

of aid but active participants in the solution. Local adaptation strategies, such as eco-friendly agricultural practices, disaster-resilient infrastructure, and capacity-building for women and youth must be supported through targeted funding and policy interventions.

Furthermore, Bangladesh's voice must be amplified on the global stage, demanding accountability from those who have contributed the most to climate change. The country's leaders must continue to advocate for compensation and financial support, ensuring that climate justice is integrated into international climate agreements.

The urgency of climate justice for Bangladesh cannot be overstated. As one of the most vulnerable countries in the world, Bangladesh needs not just global solidarity but a fair distribution of resources to protect its people from the worst effects of climate change. It is not enough for the world to acknowledge the problem; it must take concrete action. By ensuring that climate justice is grounded in both distributive and procedural justice, we can create a future where Bangladesh's coastal communities have the resources, support, and voice they need to navigate the stormy waters ahead.

The "red alert" is a wake-up call for the world. It is time for countries responsible for the climate crisis to honour their commitments and provide the necessary support to nations like Bangladesh. Climate justice is not just a moral obligation; it is a lifeline for the millions at risk in the most vulnerable corners of the planet.