

Coastal people need urgent support

Help those affected by rains, improve disaster preparedness

We are quite concerned about the sufferings of people in coastal regions as recent heavy rains and tidal surges have submerged many areas, following a deep depression over the Bay of Bengal. According to a preliminary assessment by the Department of Disaster Management (DDM), seven out of 19 coastal districts experienced significant damage, with a significant portion of homes and infrastructure severely affected. At least two deaths have been reported, including a police officer who died when a trawler capsized in the Meghna River, leaving eight people missing.

While the depression has now weakened, light to moderate rainfall is expected across the country over the next few days, with further flooding anticipated in Sylhet, Sunamganj, Moulvibazar, and Netrokona. In that case, there are also chances of landslides in areas like Chattogram. Against this backdrop, the government must make it a priority to provide immediate aid to the affected regions while also strengthening its preparedness for future disasters.

Among the more affected districts are Noakhali, Patuakhali, Bhola, Cox's Bazar, Khulna, Barguna, and Barishal, which suffered from a combination of flooding, strong winds, and embankment breaches. People are still stranded across these districts, enduring food and water shortages. Meanwhile, thousands of homes have been destroyed, vast Aman seedbeds submerged, and many fish farms washed away. For instance, the fisheries sector in Barishal alone suffered an estimated Tk 45 crore in losses. In the Sundarbans, tidal surges contaminated freshwater ponds. In Khulna, a collapsed embankment near Harinkhola has left 15,000 residents in distress. Transportation has also been severely affected in all these regions as rains have caused severe waterlogging. In St Martin's Island, residents are struggling with food shortages and power outages due to boat service suspension.

The full extent of the damage will only be known after a complete assessment is conducted. However, based on our reports, we can assume that the economic loss caused by recent flooding would be huge and take time to recover. We, therefore, urge the government to take all necessary measures to address it. It must intensify efforts to assist affected communities and deploy teams to hard-to-reach areas with food, water, and medicine. Additionally, it should provide monetary assistance to crop and fish farmers who have lost their sources of income. Repairing breached embankments and building new ones, where necessary, should also be a top priority. As the monsoon season has just begun, we are likely to face more such calamities in the coming months. Our flood preparedness must therefore be more efficient so that both damage and suffering can be minimised.

Another absurd case over July atrocities

'Dead' man turning alive shows how such cases are being exploited

The extent to which the right to file cases has been exploited in the wake of the July uprising boggles the mind. It was only the other day that we commented on the questionable manner in which a 69-year-old former professor accused in an attempted murder case has been treated. The case—filed by a former Jagannath University Chhatra Dal leader who was injured in a clash at the height of the uprising—had several hallmarks of an exploitative case, including its lodging after about seven months since the alleged crime and mass listing of accused individuals (193 in total). Yet she was singled out, arrested, denied bail, and sent to jail. As we try to process the role likely played by police and magistrate courts in enabling such cases, we are again reminded of their absurdities by yet another case reported by this daily.

The victim this time, strange as it may seem, is an alive individual turned dead. According to our report, Md Selim, a grocer from Mymensingh's Phulbaria, was falsely declared dead in a murder case filed over the July uprising. Lodged by his elder brother, with two other brothers serving as witnesses, the case claims Selim was shot dead in Dhaka's Jatrabari on August 3. It also falsely implicated 41 people, including ousted PM Sheikh Hasina. Selim, who remains alive, is now fighting a surreal legal battle just to prove he exists, scurrying from office to office, facing social harassment, and fearing for his life as a potential murder would fit the narrative of his "death." The motive behind this case, as recent police investigations have uncovered, is a family dispute over inherited land. With Selim having no sons, his three brothers allegedly sought to seize his share by exploiting the chaos of the uprising to eliminate him, at least on paper.

That the legal system could be weaponised so easily for personal gain, and that such a bizarre case could progress as far as it did, speaks volumes about the merit of many of the cases filed over July atrocities. The incident also raises alarm about the integrity of those responsible for vetting or handling such cases. If an alive man can be shown as dead, and a 69-year-old widow arbitrarily jailed, how many other opportunistic or retaliatory cases have slipped through the cracks? We call on the authorities to urgently review all such politically or personally motivated cases, and hold to account those filing or enabling them. No one must be allowed to exploit the legal system.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

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EDITORIAL

Two questions, two ironies the budget must address



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In the forthcoming 2025-26 budget, two pressing questions warrant urgent attention: how to bolster domestic resource mobilisation and how to secure financing to mitigate post-Covid poverty and income losses. These questions are not merely fiscal but are deeply entwined with historical ironies and systemic failures that continue to haunt the nation's development trajectory. A third concern, whether the budget will offer a path out of the debt spiral, was discussed in this newspaper on May 25, 2025.

The first irony lies in the colonial legacy of resource extraction. During British rule, India was drained of 30-50 million pounds annually in the late 19th century, as estimated by economist Dadabhai Naoroji. Even during the Bengal Famine of 1943, which claimed millions of lives, Bengal remained a revenue engine for the empire, contributing 10-15 percent of British India's total tax income.

Today, Bangladesh, a post-colonial state, struggles with a tax-to-GDP ratio of 7.4 percent, far below South Asia's average of 10-12 percent and the global developing-country average. This reveals a stark paradox: a nation once exploited for its revenue now grapples with mobilising resources for its own people.

The second irony is embodied by Lord Beveridge, architect of the UK's post-World War II social security system, who was born in Rangpur. His birthplace remains one of the poorest regions, with a poverty rate of 24.8 percent—6.1 percentage points above the national average of 18.7 percent, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. This juxtaposition underscores the failure to translate historical legacies into equitable policies.

The British established a centralised revenue system with salaried district collectors, replacing traditional intermediaries like zamindars with British-trained officials to ensure efficiency. Meticulous land surveys, cadastral mapping, and digitised records minimised corruption and enabled precise tax assessments. Over time, systems like the Permanent Settlement reduced intermediaries, allowing direct taxation of peasants. The British strategically monetised the economy through cash crop cultivation—indigo, opium, jute, and

tea. The strategies of administrative rigour, agrarian exploitation, and institutional coercion ensured revenue extraction for the coloniser, a contrast to the equitable system the post-colonial state now aspires to, as reminded by the July 2024 uprising.

The roots of failure lie in an economy dominated by patronage networks. Tax evasion and illicit financial flows cost the country Tk 226,000 crore in the 2022-23 fiscal



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VISUAL: STAR

year, with corporate tax evasion alone accounting for half of the staggering loss, according to the Centre for Policy Dialogue. Multinational corporations exacerbate this by siphoning off \$3.5 billion annually through abusive transfer pricing practices, according to the State of Tax Justice 2024 report.

The regressive nature of Bangladesh's tax system further entrenches inequality. While indirect tax accounts for 66 percent of NBR receipts, 38 percent of revenue comes from the VAT, disproportionately burdening low-income households. Only 1.4 percent of people file tax returns. Affluent elites exploit loopholes, such as non-resident status claims and the misclassification of business profits as tax-exempt agricultural income.

The VAT system, though holding immense potential, is crippled by millions of retail businesses operating

strategy and a well-thought-out implementation plan. Here is a sketch of five pillars of the reform agenda:

First, institutional restructuring is imperative. The NBR should be replaced with an autonomous agency, which can be called the Bangladesh Revenue Authority, to oversee tax collection, alongside a separate Bangladesh Tax and Tariff Commission to design policies.

Second, the outdated tax code requires modernisation to prioritise progressive direct taxes, simplify compliance, and mandate digital payment systems, with emphasis on enhancing the tax net, including offices at the upazila level.

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Our real emergency isn't political, it's environmental



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EJAJ AHMAD

As Bangladesh stands at the crossroads of democratic renewal, every established and emerging party has articulated its vision for change for various issues from judicial independence to educational overhaul. Yet, one critical omission in this reform conversation that renders all other reforms meaningless if left unaddressed is climate resilience.

The World Meteorological Organization's (WMO) latest Global Annual to Decadal Climate Update, released on May 28, should wake up every political leader in Bangladesh. Global temperatures are predicted to be between 1.2 and 1.9 degrees Celsius higher than pre-industrial levels for each year between 2025 and 2029, with an 86 percent chance that temperatures will exceed the critical 1.5 degrees Celsius threshold for at least one year in this period. For Bangladesh, these findings pose existential threats. Bangladesh ranks ninth worldwide for climate disaster risk, facing a brutal combination of sea level rise, temperature increases, floods, cyclones, droughts, and storm surges. Even Dhaka is sinking at nearly 12 millimetres per year due to excessive

groundwater extraction according to a Scroll.in article. The WMO specifically notes that South Asia will experience continued heavy rainfall through 2029, threatening countries where climate disasters already displace millions annually.

While these climate realities intensify, our capacity to adapt is being undermined by youth unemployment. According to the International Labor Organization's (ILO) latest report, Bangladesh's youth unemployment rate continues to be more than double the national rate, with university graduates hit hardest. With unemployment rising to 4.63 percent in fiscal 2024-25's second quarter, we have a generation of educated young people with no economic prospects in an increasingly climate-threatened nation.

These crises of climate vulnerability and youth unemployment aren't separate issues; they demand one integrated response: green jobs and climate-resilient livelihoods.

Political parties preparing manifestos for upcoming parliamentary elections need to stop treating climate change as just

another environmental issue separate from economic development. In Bangladesh, climate adaptation can support economic development. Building flood-resistant infrastructure creates construction jobs. Developing climate-smart agriculture employs farmers and agricultural technicians. Installing renewable energy systems requires skilled workers and ongoing maintenance. Green entrepreneurship is essential for survival. We need leaders who will actually connect our youth with climate-focused education and green livelihoods. This means real investments in climate-smart agriculture, renewable energy infrastructure, sustainable urban planning, and disaster-resilient construction.

It means training programmes that teach young Bangladeshis to lead clean energy transitions, design flood-resistant homes, develop drought-resistant crops, and create early warning systems for extreme weather.

In a climate-vulnerable country like Bangladesh, digital skills must be climate-focused. We need data scientists who can model flood patterns, app developers who can create disaster response platforms, and engineers who can design climate-resilient infrastructure. Important leadership skills for 2025 and beyond in Bangladesh are climate intelligence, climate literacy and climate awareness.

Leaders should understand that every policy decision, from urban planning to food production, from industrial development to educational curricula, must be seen through the lens of climate resilience.

Here's the truth no politician wants to face: no reform will work when the basic requirement for all human activity, a liveable country, no longer exists. Judicial independence means nothing if courts are regularly dealing with extreme heat and flooding. Economic growth is pointless if industries keep getting destroyed by cyclones and droughts. Educational reforms won't matter if schools are constantly damaged by climate disasters. Democratic institutions can't function if millions of climate refugees are always on the move.

Young Bangladeshi voters are looking for leaders who can handle climate change that affects youths' ability to find meaningful work, live in decent cities, and build actual lives. This should be reflected in manifestos that put green infrastructure first, promise renewable energy transitions over fossil fuel dependence, invest in climate education, and create green.

The choice for Bangladesh's political leadership is simple: adapt to meet the climate challenge or become irrelevant as climate reality takes over. Young Bangladeshis, educated, unemployed, and very aware of their climate vulnerability, won't support leaders who don't get this basic truth.

Climate resilience isn't just another item on the reform list; it's what makes all other reforms possible. Until our political parties grasp this, they're not offering real leadership. They're just offering different versions of ignoring reality. The choice is between climate-smart politics and climate-blind politics. We need to make that choice now.

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