

## Time to end the carnage on our roads

### RSF data on June road fatalities raises fresh alarm

Despite countless lives being lost in road crashes across the country year after year, it is astounding that the crisis continues to be met with a shocking level of indifference or ineffectiveness from those responsible for road safety. According to the latest data from Road Safety Foundation (RSF), at least 696 people were killed in June. That is, mind you, an average of over 23 lives lost every day. For context, as per Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity, 614 people were killed in May and 583 in April. While the June data was likely influenced by increased road trips during the extended Eid-ul-Azha holiday, the overall trend points to a chronic problem that cannot be blamed on seasonal home rush alone.

These persistently grim statistics should have jolted us into decisive interventions long ago. The question is, why didn't they? A closer look at the June data reveals just how pervasive and multidimensional the crisis has become. Motorcycles—which are proving increasingly hard to regulate—alone accounted for over 37 percent of total crashes and nearly 33 percent of fatalities. Pedestrians made up more than 17 percent of the deaths, while another 15 percent were drivers and their assistants. The RSF has identified excessive speeding as the leading cause of most accidents. Other long-standing factors include unfit vehicles, poorly designed and maintained roads, unskilled and overworked drivers, weak traffic enforcement, and the widespread disregard for traffic laws.

This deadly mix has created an environment of near-total anarchy on our roads, and unless it is systematically addressed, road casualties will continue to claim lives. In this context, the government's ongoing effort to draft a new road safety law based on the UN-endorsed Safe System Approach seems like a positive step. Reportedly, a preliminary draft is currently under review. Structured around five key pillars—safer people, safer roads, safer vehicles, safer speeds, and post-crash care—the draft law promises to address core issues that the current Road Transport Act, 2018 has failed to tackle adequately.

But let us be clear: legislation alone cannot save lives. The Road Transport Act, for all its flaws, has provisions that could have improved road safety if implemented properly. Unfortunately, it has remained largely toothless due to a lack of political will, institutional coordination, and enforcement. The same fate must not befall the new law. If passed, it must be enforced without fear or favour, and accompanied by serious investments in traffic management, public awareness, driver training, and post-crash response systems.

Given the persistent fatalities, we urge the interim government to take the crisis of road safety with the urgency it deserves. The authorities must do everything necessary to finally break the cycle of neglect and lack of accountability that has allowed so many lives to be lost in vain. There is no excuse left for inaction.

## JU's greenery must be preserved

### Protect the campus from unplanned development

It is truly shocking that Jahangirnagar University, known for its tranquil, green campus, is gradually losing its greenery to various development projects. Recently, around 50 trees were felled in front of the Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) building to make way for an extension under the Faculty of Mathematical and Physical Sciences. After this sparked outrage among students and environmental activists, both the VC and the director of the university's "Further Development Project" said they had no clue about the incident. The director stressed that he did not give permission to cut the trees, while the VC insisted that he was not informed about the removal of so many trees. The question is, how can a contractor firm fell trees without prior permission from the authorities concerned? Who, then, is really responsible for this violation?

Unfortunately, this episode comes after the JU administration's earlier assurance that no construction involving tree felling would proceed without the visible development of a master plan. JU has already lost its vast greenery and water bodies due to such construction works. A recent land use study—analysing data from 1988 to 2023—revealed that the campus has lost nearly 40 percent of its water bodies over the past three and a half decades. The study also found that the university's original master plan, designed in 1968 by the eminent architect Mazharul Islam, has been largely neglected in subsequent development projects. Despite repeated protests from students and environmentalists, tree felling has continued unabated. In the latest case, the manager of the contractor firm said that his workers went to fell the trees as the students of the mathematics department told him to do so. This raises another question: can the students authorise such a task without the authorities' approval?

Such environmentally harmful activities pose a serious threat to the campus's biodiversity and ecological balance. Too often, development projects are carried out without any prior biodiversity assessment. A university biodiversity team has warned that the proposed "Further Development Project" could result in the loss of 2,055 plants from 28 species. We, therefore, call on the authorities to immediately halt all environmentally destructive projects and activities. It is imperative that a comprehensive master plan is developed for the JU to protect its greenery and water bodies. As for the latest violation, the administration must conduct a transparent investigation and hold those responsible accountable. Indiscriminate cutting of trees must stop.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY



### Republic of the Philippines proclaimed

On this day in 1946, the Republic of the Philippines was proclaimed, and Manuel Roxas became its first president.

# When the state thinks like a man



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A woman was tortured, disrobed, subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment in Muradnagar, Cumilla. She was filmed against her will, without her consent, and her shame was widely publicised, auctioned, and politicised. She, as a woman, does not inhabit the vacuum, and represents no one identity—she is a woman, has a non-dominant identity, and is socioeconomically vulnerable. These identities shape her lived reality and her movement across multiple axes of power, oppression, and dominance. Certainly, her sex was the most prominent at the time she was brutalised, tortured, and sexualised both physically and online, but other identities also contributed at varying degrees to the treatment she sustained.

The woman's body was lewdly relevant on social media, and so was the age-old vernaculars of gender politics. On one end, there were men (and women too) claiming there was no rape, but an extramarital affair, in a way justifying the act of gender-based torture and abuse. Then there were men sexualising the victim's body, aggravating her physical-sexual violence and reproducing her trauma. Even those who apparently were in favour of the victim, albeit unknowingly, were against victims of similar other crimes. "The door was broken, and this proves rape" or "there was force and force is a constituent element of rape," some argued. They were perhaps well-meaning, yet oblivious that there could have still been rape without the door being broken, without signs of physical force being visible, and without a perfect victim. Whether there was consent or not, legally speaking, is the fact in issue in a rape case, and is to be proven or disproven in a court of law within a criminal justice system of adequate standard. As it transpires, the victim will likely withdraw her case and our social media judges will likely hand down the final verdict against her, with

pluralist disagreements, concurrent opinions, and perhaps a few dissents.

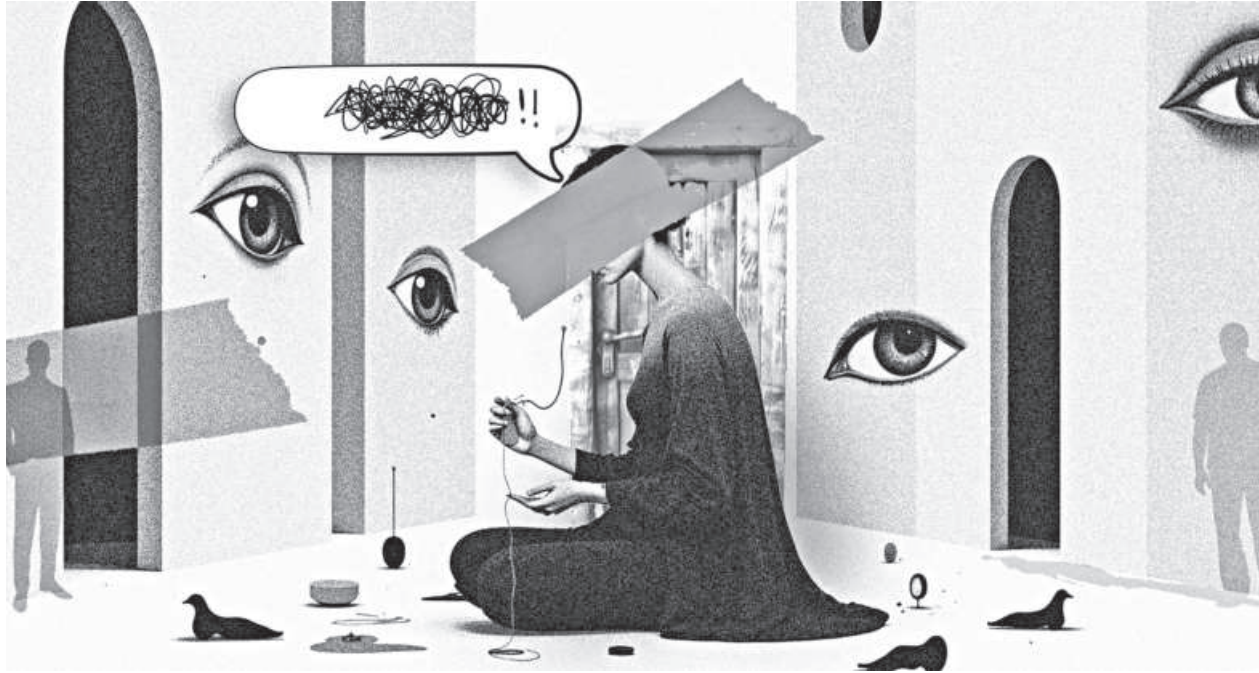
Feminist scholars argue that the concept of consent is inherently unequal, and we need to look beyond consent and physical force and at the multiple inequalities of power—age, class, race, religion—when adjudicating a coerced sexual relationship. Our laws

courts, too, have operated on a narrow domain of defining rape, and have largely been obsessed with evidence of physical force, with presumption of an ideal versus imperfect victim, and with uncalled for virtue-signalling every now and then. Our legal institutions and criminal justice actors all reflect a perverse lack of gender sensitivity, if not always blatant misogyny. Careful research on the laws and judgements clearly reveal how the state and its institutions have always thought like a man without leaving inches at all for intersectional storytelling on part of the victim, who is almost always a woman or a child.

The nation-building in the post-independence context did not have an explicit "woman question" in mind. The

conversation with the woman question. Even the agenda on women's reserved seats in parliament sounds hollow when major political parties speak in the language of formal and formulaic equality without accounting for what lies in the substance.

An individual woman sustains the cruelest of what is decided by powerful men for women as a collective. The rather benign jokes about women being subservient to men, thoughtless abuses hurled at women demanding equality, acts of physical violence against women simply for dressing differently (and celebrations surrounding such acts of violence)—all undergird such gender-based torture. It is the appositional norms of compulsion and compliance, dominance and subservience, within



VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

and policies have historically been skewed, disproportionately impacting and marginalising women. Years of research-based advocacy has failed to bring in meaningful reforms in the rape laws (we have yet to change the 1860 Penal Code definition of rape, rather bringing in new confusions with few peripheral contestations such as criminalising sexual intercourse upon promise of marriage in the Nari o Shishu Nirjaton Domon (Shongshodhon) Ordinance, 2025. Our

inexplicable sexual violence sustained by women during the Liberation War became a peripheral national shame wrought by the war enemies and not a central nation-building issue to be confronted with. The woman question got packaged and "NGO-ised" as a development agenda in the 1980s and continued to be so in various forms. With the reform agenda for the so-called "second republic", the meta and macro reform agendas screamed the loudest, without being at all in

which such gender-based violence takes place, and with such violence, we see why the private is in fact political, and how simply gender-based inequalities get compounded and exacerbated.

The incident unmasked, yet again, the cruel face of the state as a male homologue, with all its male institutions, built political environment and infrastructures. Indeed, the state is a male, and "it adopts the standpoint of male power" on the relation between woman and the state, always.

# The climate budget for FY26 is disappointing



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Since the 2015-16 fiscal year, alongside the national budgets, the Finance Division of the government has commendably produced "climate budgets." These modest-sized documents outline the expenditure of 25 ministries and government agencies on climate change. Per the climate budget of FY2025-26, these agencies have been allocated Tk 41,208.97 crore to spend on climate action in the new fiscal year. This represents 10.07 percent of their total budget, 5.2 percent of the national budget, and 0.66 percent of GDP—figures similar to those seen in recent years. However, the new climate budget disappoints me for three reasons.

First, There is little to no structural improvement in the 136 page document compared to the previous versions. For instance, in January 2019, the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP, 2009), a revolutionary policy instrument, became obsolete after its 10-year tenure. Since then, not updating it in the five and a half years until July 2024 was a failure of the previous regime. But how can the current reform-mandated interim government, with capable and dynamic advisers in charge of finance and environment, present the new climate budget based on the outdated six pillars of the BCCSAP? The themes are: i) food security, social protection, and health; ii) comprehensive disaster management; iii) infrastructure; iv) research and knowledge management; v) mitigation and low-carbon

development; and vi) capacity-building and institutional strengthening.

The world is fast shifting towards new directions in climate action. The new climate budget of Bangladesh should have allocated funds under the Just Transition theme—not just for emission reduction, but also for ensuring workers' rights during such transitions. Another emerging theme is Locally Led Adaptation (LLA), which shifts responsibility for adaptation to local communities and actors, supported by external stakeholders. Where adaptation fails, we face

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"loss and damage"—an area beyond conventional disaster response, and particularly relevant to Bangladesh.

Over the past six years, approaches like nature-based solutions (NbS) have been mainstreamed into our development and climate agenda, and the climate budget should have recognised that. It's time we understood that knowledge creation and management, capacity-building, and technology transfer cannot

remain standalone themes; they must cut across all major areas. Yet, we remain stuck with the philosophies of 2009 for another year.

Second, the allocations are still made across 25 government agencies, as has been the practice for the past nine years. It has been repeatedly suggested to include local-level allocations in the climate budget, as



FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

we now have a robust understanding of location-specific climate vulnerabilities. Bangladesh's National Adaptation Plan (NAP) for 2023-2050 exemplifies such assessments. So, it would not have been difficult for the Finance Division to make geographically focused climate budget estimates—specifically for districts, upazilas, and unions—based on project locations already mentioned in public- and donor-funded project documents. That would have been a fundamental shift, but the opportunity was missed.

Third, for reasons unknown, the Finance Division remains fixated on 25 ministries, departments, and divisions when considering the climate budget. I have long advocated for expanding this boundary. A clear candidate for inclusion is the youth ministry, especially after the youth-led movement in July last year. The interim government seems more

inclined to engage young people in national politics than in climate action. That's why the enthusiasm sparked by the chief adviser at COP29 in Baku last year, where he engaged with the Bangladeshi youth, failed to be reflected in this crucial annual climate finance exercise.

Similarly, it is perplexing why the ministries of religious affairs and information have no place in the climate budget. Given the influence of religious leaders in shaping beliefs, social systems, and politics, shouldn't they be part of climate action? The information ministry's role has also been largely ignored, except for one Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund (BCCCTF) project. Media houses working on climate do so largely due to the personal commitment of senior leaders, not government facilitation.

Many of these issues could have been addressed if the relevant ministries had held consultations with stakeholders before drafting the climate budget.

Indeed, the failure of the Finance Division and the environment ministry to reform the climate budget is disappointing. Equally disheartening is the relative silence of NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs), which used to be more vocal about such shortcomings. That said, over the next few months, we will likely witness a flurry of activity within ministries and NGO/CSO offices as they prepare for COP30 in Belém, Brazil in November this year.

This apathy towards the climate budget mirrors another alarming trend: no political party in Bangladesh—new or old, young or established—addresses climate change in any meaningful way. Unless this changes, the upcoming election manifestos will likely have nothing significant on climate change—the most pressing, transgenerational crisis of our lifetime. And if that happens, it would truly be a disappointment.