

# Bangladesh faces a legal void on climate-induced migration

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Much has been made of Bangladesh's perceived vulnerability to climate change—it consistently ranks among the countries projected to suffer the worst human, economic and cultural losses. In response, Bangladesh has taken a policy-driven approach to tackling the problem, developing a labyrinth of climate change policies and engaging vociferously on the global stage to lead negotiations at the Conference of the Parties (COP) on issues such as Nationally Determined Contributions and the Fund for Loss and Damage.

Relatively less focus, however, has been paid to the issue of developing a domestic legal framework that complements Bangladesh's global ambitions and commitments. Significantly, the issue of climate-induced displacement and autonomous mobility linked to climate change has flown under the radar in the face of *in-situ* adaptation and mitigation efforts by the state.

Bangladesh is no stranger to displacement. Disaster-induced displacement, both temporary and permanent, has long been a feature of the country, owing to its low-lying topography. Climate change exacerbates this displacement risk by amplifying the intensity of sudden onset events such as cyclones and tidal surges, while also creating new streams of pre-emptive mobility through slow-onset changes such as prolonged droughts and salinity intrusion caused by sea level rise.

As of the end of 2024, there were 585,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Bangladesh. This figure excludes those who have been obliged to move, often in anticipatory fashion, due to how climate change has affected their livelihoods, assets and way of life. Add to this the fact that, *ceteris paribus*, Bangladesh is projected to lose between 12.34 and 17.95 percent of its coastal landmass due to sea-level rise-induced flooding by 2100, the estimation that by 2050 one in every seven people in the country will be displaced due to climate change does not seem far-fetched.

Within this context, how prepared are

urban spaces to deal with the ongoing influx of those who autonomously relocate or are forcibly displaced? Data highlights that Dhaka is taking in a significant number of new arrivals each day, many of whom realistically fall into the categories described above. Rapid and spontaneous urbanisation has given rise to a sprawling mosaic of informal settlements

displaced individuals can hold policymakers accountable?

Bangladesh's Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP), the guiding document, outlines the scope of government activities to address climate change and to fund projects through the Bangladesh Climate Trust Fund, established by the Climate Trust Fund Act

on Internal Displacement. The disconnect between these two government documents highlights a broader disconnect between ministries and policymakers.

Having exhausted avenues under the climate change paradigm, we turn to the normative legal framework to identify mechanisms for ensuring durable solutions

rights for displaced people or those at risk of displacement due to environmental failures. As such, the absence of explicit constitutional provisions for climate-displaced persons severely limits legal enforcement.

The Non-Agricultural Khas Land Management and Settlement Policy 1995 allows for the long-term settlement of Khas lands for climate-displaced people and their rehabilitation on unused government land. However, there is a legal prohibition against such settlements within major metropolises such as Dhaka, Chattogram, or the municipality of Narayanganj.

As a result, many climate-displaced communities end up living in informal settlements, with insecure tenure and in environmentally hazardous areas, facing further displacement due to evictions, fires, or disasters like floods.

The inadequate legal framework to ensure tenureship for displaced communities in urban areas is born out of faulty logic and an aversion to data. In the absence of viable livelihood opportunities elsewhere, displaced people inevitably relocate to cities. By failing to decentralise development away from urban centres—while also restricting the possibility of tenureship for the displaced—the state has consigned a significant portion of its population to a life of precarity and uncertainty.

While emergency litigation to halt slum evictions has taken place in the High Court, these interventions have not structurally altered the existing barriers to durable solutions for climate-displaced individuals. It is essential for the state to make fundamental changes to its approach to climate change adaptation by recognising the phenomena of climate displacement and autonomous, climate-induced mobility, and ensuring that these communities have access to durable solutions.

This also entails acknowledging the high concentration of such displaced communities within urban spaces and developing secure livelihoods and tenure solutions accordingly. While urban density should rightly be a concern for the government, the problem cannot be solved through exclusionary policies or anti-poor governance.

Decentralised urbanisation processes must go hand in hand with ensuring durable solutions for displaced and floating communities who are struggling to survive in metropolitan spaces today.



Disaster-induced displacement, both temporary and permanent, has long been a feature of the country, owing to its low-lying topography.

FILE PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

across urban and peri-urban spaces.

Within these informal settlements, communities live under constant threat of eviction and in deteriorated conditions, as though abandoned by the state. It is important to consider two key questions: first, is the current urban planning and climate change response framework capable of effectively accommodating these communities and providing them with adequate housing and services? Second, is there a coherent legal framework through which distressed and

2010. Unfortunately, it fails to address human mobility in its social protection and disaster management programmes. As a result, people who move forcibly or autonomously in the face of climate change are largely left to fend for themselves.

The absence of a mobility and displacement narrative in the BCCSAP is even more puzzling when read alongside the National Strategy on Internal Displacement Management, which insists upon durable solutions for IDPs in line with the United Nations Guiding Principles

for climate-displaced communities. Article 15 of the Bangladesh constitution guarantees access to basic necessities, including housing, for all citizens, but this is judicially unenforceable.

Although fundamental human rights to equality before the law, equal protection and treatment, and the right to life are guaranteed, these do not amount to immediate housing provision or durable solutions for the displaced. Moreover, Article 18A does not establish any corresponding

## REMEMBERING MUGDHO

# A life full of warmth and courage

Jahir Rezwan (not real name)  
was a friend of Mir Mahfuzur Rahman Mugdho.

JAHIR REZWAN

The day I first met Mugdho (Mir Mahfuzur Rahman) is etched in my memory. It was January 5, 2019. Our esteemed professor, Dr Munnujahan Ara, came to our classroom looking for students who were interested in cultural activities. Mugdho and I, both guitar enthusiasts, immediately volunteered. Our shared passion for music quickly forged a friendship during rehearsals, and I was struck by how effortlessly he seemed to connect with others.

Beyond his impressive guitar skills, Mugdho was a talented ukulele player and an astonishing beatboxer. He exuded an unyielding spirit, as if nothing could deter him from his pursuits. We became constant companions, dedicated to our academics as well as a myriad of extracurricular activities. From the football field to the cricket pitch, chess, table tennis, and carom board—there was hardly an activity on campus in which



VISUAL: STAR

we didn't participate together. Our spirited discussions—"storms over a cup of tea"—became a cherished routine.

I remember some pivotal memories that can offer a glimpse of the extraordinary individual Mugdho was.

In 2019, during our first year at university, I received a wedding invitation from a batchmate in Magura. Hearing about it, Mugdho declared, "Mama, your friend is my friend too. Let's go to Magura together." We embarked on the journey, attending the ceremony for a mere 15-20 minutes. Yet, in that brief period, his spirit created an enduring memory. As we prepared to return to Khulna, he boldly said, "I'll get us back to Khulna for free!" I scoffed at the impossibility, but Mugdho, undeterred, approached the bus conductor. Miraculously, the conductor agreed, with the condition that we ride on the roof. We saved our fare and, with that money, watched a film at Monihar Cinema Hall in Jashore before catching a local train back to Khulna.

On another occasion, Mugdho woke me up one night saying one of our batchmates was seriously ill. "Hurry, we have to go!" he

told me. We took the university ambulance and rushed our friend to the hospital. The following day we had our semester final exam. Without a hint of hesitation, Mugdho assured our other batchmates, "All of you go. I'll stay here, no worries." While everyone else headed back to the dorms to study, three of us remained at the hospital with our ailing friend. That day, I realised for the first time how compassionate Mugdho was. He never hesitated to offer help to others.

I also must speak of his remarkable family. One day, Mugdho invited me to his cousin's wedding. I readily agreed. There, I met Snigdho, his twin, and their playful interaction was funny. Though it was my first visit to their home, their inherent warmth and welcoming nature made me feel instantly at ease. What particularly touched me was his aunt's gestures. That explained Mugdho's innate friendliness. Later, meeting his uncle, I understood from where Mugdho had gotten his profound sense of responsibility.

On campus, I witnessed Mugdho consistently raise his voice against corruption and drug abuse. He dedicated himself to the well-being of our batch and the university as a whole. He tirelessly attempted to establish a scout group at Khulna University, but administrative oversights unfortunately thwarted these efforts. Nevertheless, he never

refused anyone in need, offering assistance at any moment.

We were both avid travellers, participating in every tour organised by our mathematics department. We revisited many places, but our most memorable journey together was in 2022. We embarked on a bike tour from Khulna, aiming to explore the northern part of Bangladesh. We traversed 18 districts, ending up in Tetulia where we watched the greatest football World Cup final in history on TV.

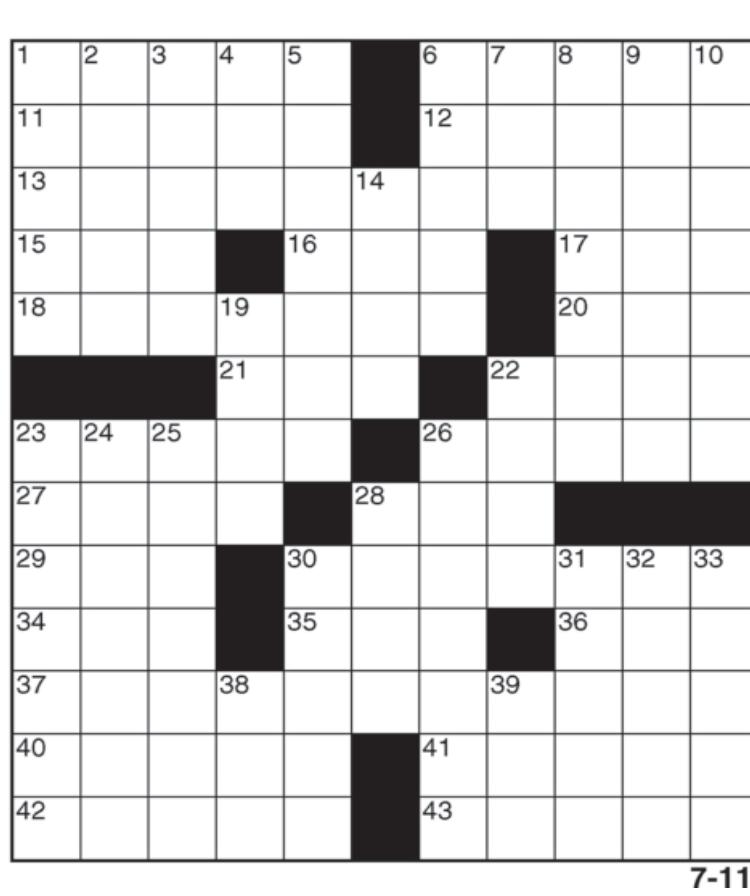
The last time I saw him in person was at Uttara North Metro Station in Dhaka. He offered me a ride on his beloved Bumblebee, his bike, to see me off. He used to say, "I'm going to study in Europe so I can travel all over the continent." On our last phone call, he said, "Mama, get your passport ready. We're going to India together." My passport is ready, but Mugdho is no more.

Today marks one year since Mugdho was taken away from us. He now exists solely in our cherished memories, where he will forever smile and playfully ask, "Kire? Ki obostha?" ("Hey! How are things?").

CROSSWORD  
BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS  
1 Following  
6 Miles of music  
11 Rich cake  
12 Decree  
13 TV network, e.g.  
15 In the past  
16 Road goo  
17 Mahershala of "Moonlight"  
18 Shaped shrub  
20 Chess piece  
21 Tear  
22 Plane part  
23 Bike part  
26 Flexes  
27 Yale students  
28 Pot brew  
29 Shade tree  
30 Refuses to go along with  
34 Family  
35 Pole worker  
36 In the style of  
37 Wizard, e.g.  
40 Useful skill  
41 Polo, for one  
42 Exams  
43 Scout shelters

DOWN  
1 Chance to swing  
2 Do without  
3 Scout group  
4 Pilot's guess:  
Abbr.  
5 Nickname for a Tuskegee Airman  
6 Sweetheart  
7 TV spots  
8 Thiamin or niacin  
9 Reykjavik's nation  
10 Orchestra section  
14 Complain  
19 Some nest eggs  
22 Watered down  
23 Eyes discreetly  
24 Squashed circle  
25 Low light  
26 Northern Ireland city  
28 Soft mineral  
30 Karate levels  
31 Glossy fabric  
32 Vigilant  
33 Bakery buys  
38 Rent out  
39 That woman



## WEDNESDAY'S ANSWERS



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