

# Ending Bangladesh's environmental data drought



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Just last year, as a Chevening scholar pursuing an MSc in Computational and Data Journalism at Cardiff University, I worked on a fascinating project: turning Britain's live rainfall data into a self-generating instrumental soundscape. It was a creative way to engage the public with environmental information, made possible due to something remarkable. Britain has a network of 1500 rain gauge stations spread across England, Scotland and Wales that feed data every 15 minutes into a public API (think of it as a direct, automated connection to machine-readable data) that anyone can immediately access free of charge from anywhere in the world. Some of these stations date back to the 1850s, and data from the stations are used to predict rain, flood and other weather events with extreme accuracy and granularity.

As a Bangladeshi, my mind jumped home. Our nation, one of the most vulnerable countries to extreme weather events, could benefit immensely from such a system. I immediately started researching. Bangladesh has fewer than 300 such stations maintained by the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB). While its website looks nifty with maps of rainfall distribution and inundation, the data is updated only daily, and the raw data (the kind that can be analysed in a spreadsheet or programming language) is nowhere to be found on the site. Instead, that raw data is hidden behind several layers of bureaucratic, technological, and financial walls. The manual alone—which describes how to get a static snapshot of the data, not a live feed—is 14 pages long. One must go through a rigorous online application process, complete with a payment.

As one of the only few data journalists in Bangladesh, this is a wall I hit all too often. My search for rainfall data revealed not an anomaly, but the default setting for environmental information in our country, which is inaccessible. In fact, this isn't just



In Dhaka and other big cities, real-time waterlogging monitoring would help residents make smarter decisions regarding commuting.

FILE PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

anecdotal. The US-based non-profit Open Data Watch classifies Bangladesh 132nd out of 197 countries in its latest ranking. This abysmal position places us behind far less economically developed nations like Rwanda, Uganda, and even war-torn Myanmar.

This systemic data drought has far-reaching implications. As the monsoon recedes and the winter haze approaches, a familiar anxiety hovers over the country. But the haze that clouds our skies is matched by

a second, more insidious fog: the lack of data that prevents us from holding polluters and authorities accountable.

We have been promised a digital Bangladesh for more than a decade now. But the persistent gap between the promise of the digital age and the reality on the ground is more than just an inconvenience. In the UK, rainfall data may inform an art project, but in Bangladesh, it is a tool for survival. If we had

For our country, this data drought extends far beyond rainfall data. Take Dhaka's toxic air. There are government bodies that monitor this data, but do the public have access to neighbourhood-level live data that would allow a parent to decide whether it is safe for their kid with asthma to play outside? Much ink has been spilled about Dhaka's river pollution, yet do we have updated, publicly available data showing the water quality of

analytical usability. And finally, there is the lack of awareness. Even on the rare occasion that an open data platform is created, it remains largely invisible to journalists and researchers due to poor outreach, which leads to the simple yet frustrating truth that unused data is as good as no data at all.

Withholding environmental data stands in direct contradiction to several national and international legal commitments. Bangladesh's own Right to Information Act establishes a citizen's right to know. Bangladesh is also a signatory to the Rio Declaration, principle 10 of which clearly states, "each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities, including information on hazardous materials and activities in their communities".

Of course, fulfilling this commitment will not be an easy task. There will be technological and financial hurdles to overcome in building a robust open data infrastructure. But the biggest hurdle to overcome is not of resources but of mindset. Our policymakers, from civil servants to ministers or advisers, must shift away from a culture of data gatekeeping to one that treats data as a public utility.

With that fresh mindset, establishing a national environmental data hub could be a crucial and practical first step towards the right direction. But this platform cannot be mere lip service; the government must ensure the data hub is regularly updated with a wide range of data, from atmospheric to biodiversity to industrial emissions, all in machine-readable format. The government should also require businesses to release data about waste discharge, emissions and overall environmental footprint. Corporate pollution must be a matter of public record.

At the same time, we journalists, researchers and civil society members should step up our efforts to invest in our own data literacy so that we can investigate, humanise and disseminate data through compelling narratives that can drive public debate and hold those in power accountable.

My experience of turning British rain into music showed me the creative potential of open data. But in Bangladesh, the potential is far more practical: the potential to build a more informed citizenry, smart cities and create more effective disaster warning systems, to name a few. The future we will build depends on the data we set free today.

# Gaza flotilla puts Israel's blockade on trial



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KHAN KHALID ADNAN

The Global Sumud Flotilla was not a photo op. It was one of the largest aid missions to attempt to break Israel's blockade of the enclave, comprising about 44 vessels carrying some 500 activists from more than 40 countries. Israel intercepted them in international waters and carried out deportations. The organisers lost their boats but gained the spotlight. The question now is what that spotlight obliges the law and the world to do.

It may be recalled that, earlier in June, there was a similar attempt when a single ship—the Madleen—was seized after a brief, well-documented effort to deliver food, medical kits and water equipment. The Sumud effort multiplied that by orders of magnitude and kept sailing despite a dragnet. Even Israel acknowledged that one ship came perilously close to Gaza's waters before being stopped. In terms of movement strategy, that is no trivial difference. It reframed a symbolic stunt into civil resistance at sea.

Israel's legal case rests on the classic law of naval blockade. The San Remo Manual permits capture of neutral vessels suspected of breaching a blockade, even on the high seas, provided conditions are met. Those conditions are not cosmetic. A blockade cannot have the starvation of civilians as its purpose, and it must allow passage of relief supplies essential for survival, subject to search and controlled distribution by a neutral body. That is black-letter law.

There is also a historical precedent that cuts both ways. The United Nations' Palmer Panel once accepted the Gaza naval blockade in principle while criticising Israel's use of force during earlier interdictions.

Nonetheless, the Palmer Panel held that a blockade is unlawful if intended solely to starve civilians or if its impact on them outweighs the military advantage gained. The UN Human Rights Council's Fact-Finding Mission took the opposite view, calling the closure a form of collective punishment. The mission concluded that while blockades may be lawful in armed conflict, the Gaza blockade of May 31, 2010, was unlawful, as it caused disproportionate harm to civilians compared with the military advantage anticipated, amounting to a humanitarian crisis. That split is exactly why the Sumud flotilla matters. It forces today's facts into contact with a doctrine written for another century.

Those facts now include binding orders and warrants that did not exist when Palmer wrote. In early 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ordered Israel to take all measures to prevent acts prohibited under the Genocide Convention and to ensure humanitarian assistance, later requiring an immediate halt to the Rafah offensive and the keeping open of Rafah for aid. These orders are not suggestions. The UN Security Council (UNSC) demanded unhindered humanitarian access in Resolution 2720 and condemned starvation of civilians as a method of warfare in Resolution 2417, then demanded a ceasefire and removal of barriers to aid in Resolution 2728. The UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry has recently concluded that Israel has indeed committed genocide in the Gaza Strip. The International Criminal Court has active arrest warrants for the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defence

Minister Yoav Gallant, alleging responsibility for the war crime of starvation as a method of warfare, among other crimes. Against that canvas, stopping civilian relief convoys at sea is not a neutral enforcement choice.

But was Sumud a failure because no boats reached the beach? No. If the metric is boxes

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delivered, yes. If the metric is shifting the legal and political cost curve, the flotilla has already altered the landscape. One vessel reached Gaza waters before being stopped. Dozens approached closer than in previous missions. Hundreds of detainees included elected officials and high-profile figures whose detention triggered demonstrations and diplomatic pressure in many capitals. Every hour of that custody kept the blockade and its human consequences in the news cycle. That is a strategic outcome in itself. Amnesty International has rightly described Israel's interception of the Global Sumud Flotilla as unlawful, highlighting it as evidence of Israel's ongoing intent to deliberately starve Palestinians in Gaza.

What should states do now? Start with first principles. States whose nationals remain detained should insist that any deportations respect due process and consular access. More

broadly, member states should operationalise Resolution 2720 by insisting that cargo inspected by an impartial mechanism under UN coordination move by sea to Gaza without political veto. That is consistent with San Remo rules requiring the passage of medical supplies and essentials, and with ICJ orders demanding unimpeded assistance. Arms exports and surveillance support that enable the enforcement of a closure starving civilians should be suspended as a matter of due diligence under international humanitarian law.

How can a future mission actually reach Gaza, given Israeli surveillance and interdiction capacity? Civilian convoys alone will not break a military closure. The next increment is not stealth but legitimacy at scale. A sustainable maritime corridor requires state actors and the UN to intervene. That means flagged governmental or UN-contracted vessels, real-time inspection by an agreed neutral authority, live tracking open to all parties, pre-agreed distribution under the International Committee of the Red Cross or a comparable body, and escorts by non-belligerent navies whose rules of engagement are limited to protection of the humanitarian mission. San Remo provides for the passage of essentials under supervision. The UNSC has the mandate to backstop that with political authority and reporting. Without those guardrails, each brave civilian voyage will run into the same wall.

Moreover, what about the activists from over 40 countries? Their diversity is not window dressing. It creates diplomatic hooks in many capitals and normalises the view that starving a population is beyond the pale. It also tests the seriousness of states that claim to support the ICJ and the UNSC. Furthermore, the broader relevance of Sumud is that it calls time on legal complacency. For years, lawyers debated blockade doctrine in journals while Gaza's lights went out. Now the law is back on the water. The flotilla exposed the

distance between elegant theories and the daily reality of a population pushed to the brink. It forced a reckoning that can no longer be outsourced to footnotes. Either the international community enforces the

rules it wrote on humanitarian access and the prohibition of starvation, or it admits those rules are for other wars and other peoples. That is the stark clarity Sumud Flotilla delivered.

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০৫ অক্টোবর ২০২৫

**অকেজো গাড়ি নিলামে বিক্রয়ের দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি**

জনপ্রশাসন মন্ত্রণালয়ের ০৫ (পাঁচ) টি নিশান মাইক্রোবাস যার রেজিস্ট্রেশন নম্বর যথাক্রমে ঢাকা মেট্রো-৫-৫১-৭৫৭৭,৭৫৭৮,৭৫৭৯,৭৫৮০ ও ৭৫৮১ এবং হিরো হোডা (গ্রামার) ১২৫ সিসির ০৩টি মটরসাইকেল রেজিস্ট্রেশন নম্বর: ঢাকা মেট্রো-৫-৪৯-২৯১৭, ২৯১৮ এবং ২৯১৯ 'যেখানে যে অবস্থায় আছে' ভিত্তিতে নিলামে বিক্রয়ের জন্য বাংলাদেশের প্রকৃত নাগরিক/আগন্তী ক্রেতাদের নিকট থেকে সিলমোহরকৃত দরপত্র আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছে। দরপত্রের পূরুত্বপূর্ণ শর্ত ও তথ্য নিম্নরূপ:-

ক্রমিক নং	বিষয়	বিবরণ
০১।	বিক্রয়ের শিরোনাম	জনপ্রশাসন মন্ত্রণালয়ের অকেজো যথেষ্টকৃত গাড়ি নিলামে বিক্রয় বিজ্ঞপ্তি
০২।	মন্ত্রণালয়	জনপ্রশাসন মন্ত্রণালয়
০৩।	দরপত্র আহ্বানকারীর নাম ও ঠিকানা	সে।: আলমগীর কবীর, প্রশাসন-৪ শাখা, জনপ্রশাসন মন্ত্রণালয় (নতুন ভবন নং-০১, কক্ষ নং-১১০৫), বাংলাদেশ সচিবালয়, ঢাকা।
০৪।	দরপত্র আহ্বানের সারক নং ও তারিখ	০৫.০০.০০০০.১১৩.২৮.০৩২.২৫-৯৫২, তারিখ: ০৫-১০-২০২৫
০৫।	দরপত্রের বিবরণ	অকেজো যথেষ্টকৃত নিশান মাইক্রোবাস (ঢাকা মেট্রো-৫-৫১-৭৫৭৭, ৭৫৭৮, ৭৫৭৯, ৭৫৮০ ও ৭৫৮১) এবং ১২৫ সিসির ০৩টি মটরসাইকেল (ঢাকা মেট্রো-৫-৪৯-২৯১৭, ২৯১৮ এবং ২৯১৯) নিলামে বিক্রয়।
০৬।	ক্রয়/সেত্রে পদ্ধতি	উপকৃত দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি
০৭।	দরপত্র দাখিল/সিডিউল বিক্রয়ের সর্বশেষ তারিখ ও সময়	১৯ অক্টোবর ২০২৫ তারিখ অফিস সময় পর্যন্ত
০৮।	দরপত্র জমা দেয়ার সর্বশেষ তারিখ, সময় ও স্থান	২০ অক্টোবর ২০২৫, বেলা: ১.৩০ ঘটিকা, জনপ্রশাসন মন্ত্রণালয় (নতুন ভবন নং-০১, কক্ষ নং-১১০৫), বাংলাদেশ সচিবালয়, ঢাকা।
০৯।	দরপত্র খোলার তারিখ ও সময়	২০ অক্টোবর ২০২৫, বেলা: ৩.০০ ঘটিকা, জনপ্রশাসন মন্ত্রণালয় (নতুন ভবন নং-০১, কক্ষ নং-১১০৫), বাংলাদেশ সচিবালয়, ঢাকা।
১০।	অকেজো গাড়ি পরিদর্শনের স্থান	০৫ (পাঁচ) টি নিশান মাইক্রোবাস সরকারি যানবাহন অধিদপ্তরের গ্যারেজে এবং ১২৫ সিসির ০৩টি মটরসাইকেল বাংলাদেশ সচিবালয়ের নতুন ভবন নং-০১ এর গ্যারেজে রাখা আছে। অফিস চলাকালে নিজ ব্যবস্থায় পরিদর্শন করতে হবে।
১১।	দরপত্র দাখিল/সিডিউল বিক্রয়ের স্থান	প্রশাসন-৪ শাখা, জনপ্রশাসন মন্ত্রণালয় (নতুন ভবন নং-০১, কক্ষ নং-১১০৫), বাংলাদেশ সচিবালয়, ঢাকা।
১৩।	যোগাযোগের ঠিকানা	জনপ্রশাসন মন্ত্রণালয়, নতুন ভবন নং-০১, কক্ষ নং-১১০৫, বাংলাদেশ সচিবালয়, ঢাকা।
১৪।	ফোন নম্বর ও ইমেইল	০২-২৬৬৪৪৫০০, <a href="mailto:admins@mopa.gov.bd">admins@mopa.gov.bd</a>
১৫।	দরপত্র জামানত	উপকৃত দরপত্র ১০%
১৬।	যার অন্তর্ভুক্ত জামানত পে-অর্ডার/ব্যাংক ড্রাফট করতে হবে	উপসিবি, প্রশাসন-৪, জনপ্রশাসন মন্ত্রণালয়, বাংলাদেশ সচিবালয়, ঢাকা।
১৭।	কর্তৃপক্ষ কোন কারণ দর্শানো ব্যতিরেকে যে কোন দরপত্র বাতিল অথবা গ্রহণের ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করেন।	

২। ক) দরপত্র সিডিউল ক্রয় ব্যতীত কোন দরপত্র/দরপত্র সিডিউলের ফটোকপি প্রদানযোগ্য হবে না;  
খ) জামানত ব্যতীত কোন দরপত্র গৃহিত হবে না;  
গ) বিজ্ঞপ্তি শর্তাবলী দরপত্র সিডিউলে উল্লেখ থাকবে।

**স্বাক্ষরিত**  
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ফোন: ০২-২৬৬৪৪৫০০

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