

## Protect our children at all costs

### Brutal killing of six-year-old a reminder of vulnerabilities facing children

The regularity with which children are being harassed, abused, and raped is quite alarming. Several reports published over the past few months have revealed stark findings on child violence in the country. The latest gruesome incident involved the murder of a six-year-old girl in Shariatpur's Bhedarganj upazila. Reportedly, the child, a nursery student, went missing on September 24. Two days later, her body was recovered from a neighbour's septic tank. According to the post-mortem report, she was sexually assaulted before being strangled to death. The details of the torture inflicted on this little girl would leave one numb with horror. What kind of society do we live in where children face such brutal fates? Why is the state failing to ensure that our children grow up in a safe environment?

According to Ain o Salish Kendra, between January and August this year, a total of 297 children were killed across the country. The ages of the victims make the incidents even more disturbing. Among the children who were killed, 65 were between the ages of 0-6, and 66 were between 7-12. ASK data on child rape is similarly disturbing—326 girls and 34 boys raped in the first eight months of 2025. Worryingly still, the actual number of such victims could be much higher as many incidents go unreported, and cases are filed in only a handful of incidents. But what do those numbers say about our state's child protection measures? Evidently, not much has improved even after decades of discussions and numerous government programmes aimed at ensuring child rights.

Unfortunately, our justice system also often fails the victims of such crimes, with numerous loopholes in the legal system obstructing the path to justice. Reportedly, between January and August this year, the conviction rate for crimes against children was just 0.52 percent, with a punishment rate of only 0.30 percent. Clearly, such low conviction rates only embolden the perpetrators. To create a safe environment for our children, this culture of impunity must be broken. The state must ensure that those who commit crimes against children are convicted without fail by strengthening the legal process. In the Shariatpur case of child murder, we urge the government to deliver justice following a swift and thorough investigation. Only by ensuring justice in such cases can the state prevent the recurrence of crimes against children.

## Fix the Dhaka-Sylhet corridor project

### Govt must form taskforce to resolve land disputes, end ongoing paralysis

Five years since its inception, the Dhaka-Sylhet corridor project stands as a testimony to project paralysis and administrative failure typical of many government undertakings. Intended to be a 210-kilometre lifeline connecting the capital to the northeast, the four-lane highway has instead become a source of daily torment for travellers, with only 15 percent of the project's objectives said to be achieved. The cost of this delay has been staggering, turning a once six-to-seven-hour drive into an agonising 12-to-15-hour endurance test.

Currently, the Tk 16,919 crore undertaking lies functionally stalled. A protracted legal quagmire, with 56 out of 66 land acquisition lawsuits unresolved, has prevented contractors from even accessing key areas. Alongside legal issues, delays in utility relocation have further complicated matters. The project director's admission that the December 2026 deadline cannot be met clearly indicates the extent of things gone haywire.

Its ripple effect has been quite evident. The old road is now riddled with deep potholes and craters, rendering travel slow and dangerous. Massive tailbacks and single-lane bottlenecks have made a 11-kilometre stretch from Ashuganj to Sarail particularly notorious. Falling under a separate, Indian-funded project, this particular stretch was abandoned after the change in government in August 2024, when Indian contractors also departed, citing security concerns. Moreover, the entire highway suffers from a lack of basic maintenance, with the authorities claiming to be "low on funds" and constrained by the future need to "break up" the old road. This highlights a critical flaw in planning: the absence of interim maintenance to manage the existing infrastructure during the multi-year construction delay.

The argument by the Roads and Highways Department for avoiding maintenance is untenable. A minimum standard of road safety and usability must be enforced. The government must allocate funding for repairs, which should be an immediate priority in the worst-hit, gridlocked zones, so that the two lanes can be properly restored wherever feasible.

The bigger problem here is the economic drag. Infrastructure delays of this magnitude multiply transport costs for businesses and impede regional connectivity. The Dhaka-Sylhet corridor is a vital trade link. Allowing it to decay to this extent demonstrates a worrying inability to execute essential public works. Commuters are now shunning the highway, causing a massive surge in demand for alternative transport. Airlines on the Dhaka-Sylhet route are reporting 90-100 percent load factors. Bangladesh Railway, overwhelmed by passengers, is struggling to cope by adding carriages and even allowing ticketless travel on "humanitarian grounds". These issues need to be resolved.

As the most critical bottleneck here is land acquisition, the authorities must immediately establish a high-level, inter-ministerial taskforce with a mandate to resolve the ongoing lawsuits. This taskforce should fast-track legal processes for disputes that directly impact all national infrastructure, since the current system is broken.

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# EDITORIAL

## NDC 3.0 SUBMISSION

# Bangladesh raises the bar in global climate commitment



### MACRO MIRROR

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#### FAHMIDA KATUN

As the world gears up for the 30th Conference of the Parties (COP 30) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), scheduled to be held in Brazil next month, Bangladesh has renewed its climate pledge through the submission of its Third Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC 3.0). NDCs are national plans through which countries outline their commitments under the Paris Climate Agreement. Bangladesh had earlier submitted two NDCs, the first in 2015 and the second in 2021.

NDC 2.0 committed to reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 6.7 percent from the business-as-usual (BAU) level of base year 2012 on an unconditional basis. In addition, it pledged a further 15.12 percent reduction below BAU, conditional on international financial and technical support. These targets covered emissions from sectors or areas such as energy; agriculture, forestry and other land use; livestock; industrial processes and product use; and waste management.

The new submission extends Bangladesh's mitigation horizon to 2035, as opposed to 2030 in NDC 2.0, and introduces updated emission-reduction targets. It also presents a wider integration of socio-economic priorities into the climate policy. For a country responsible for less than half a percent of global GHG emissions but suffering acutely from floods, heatwaves, and sea-level rise, this represents both a moral statement and a strategic exercise in national resilience.

As with the first and second NDCs, the third also makes a dual track commitment. First, an unconditional reduction of 6.39 percent of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub>eq) emissions from the BAU level by 2035, with 2022 set as the baseline year; and second, an additional 13.92 percent CO<sub>2</sub>eq reduction conditional on international finance, technology, and capacity support. Thus, Bangladesh's total emission reduction target by 2035 stands at 20.31 percent from the BAU level. The BAU projection for 2035 is roughly 418 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>eq, meaning the projected reduction will amount to 84.97 million tonnes if both unconditional and conditional targets are achieved.

A major feature of NDC 3.0 is that energy remains the focal point. Bangladesh pledges to reduce emissions from energy sources by

26.46 percent by 2035. Smaller but significant targets have been set for industry (7.71 percent), agriculture and forestry (11.46 percent), and waste (5.06 percent). The NDC also stresses that financing will be the hinge of its implementation. This is important, as without a clear financing pathway even the best-crafted commitments risk remaining aspirational. The plan's implementation will cost about \$116.8 billion over the next decade; of this, \$25.95 billion will be from domestic sources and \$90.23 billion from external sources.

an economy-wide agenda. Proposed actions on methane control, waste-to-energy conversion, and reforestation could yield relatively low-cost emission savings. Another positive feature is the application of a social lens to climate action: by linking decarbonisation with jobs, reskilling, and social protection, NDC 3.0 places human welfare at its centre. Recognition of women and youth as active agents of the transition enhances both legitimacy and inclusiveness.

Additionally, the new NDC presents innovative financing options to achieve its targets. It references green bonds, blended finance, and carbon-market participation under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, signalling a more sophisticated approach to mobilising capital beyond traditional aid. However, there is limited self-financed ambition, which is understandable in the context of low domestic resource mobilisation and competing fiscal priorities. Even so, efforts must be strengthened to

developed countries that emit more but also possess greater financial and technical capacity. However, as our economic activities expand, emissions are likely to rise, making stronger energy efficiency measures crucial to meeting the targets. Renewables currently supply less than 5 percent of total generation, so achieving the 25 percent target by 2035 will require large-scale investment in land, grids and storage. Our policymakers must be mindful that ongoing expansion of LNG and gas infrastructure could undermine NDC objectives.

Moreover, stronger actions are necessary to address methane and waste management gaps, particularly through improved processes and technology in rice farming and livestock feeding. Agriculture and waste measures currently lack details on implementation incentives, data collection, and monitoring, which are crucial for verifiable reductions. To support a just transition, the



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

As stated above, NDC 3.0 pushes the horizon five years ahead and, crucially, signals that emissions should peak around 2029-2030 before declining. It also introduces cross-cutting priorities such as gender equality, youth participation, and a just transition. Structurally, NDC 3.0 is more data-driven and grounded in measurable indicators. One of its strengths is a clearer energy vision compared to previous submissions, setting specific numeric targets for renewable energy and efficiency. These provide predictability for investors and utilities, while commitments to curb grid losses and expand solar and wind energy mark a tangible policy shift.

Moreover, as before, the new NDC adopts a broader sectoral reach, transforming climate planning into

mobilise more resources through the private sector and innovative financial mechanisms. Nearly three-quarters of the NDC's target hinges on international support. Hence, if global funding falters, the conditional pledges will remain unfulfilled.

Another thing about financing is that it requires coordination. Mobilising the total implementation cost of \$116.8 billion will definitely test the government's institutional capacity. As climate action is inherently cross-cutting, spreading across multiple ministries, a strong coordinating body will be essential to ensure effective delivery.

For a low-emitting country like Bangladesh, the emission targets should remain realistic and not be compared with those of developing or

government must invest in skills training, social protection, and green entrepreneurship to ensure that no community is left behind in the low-carbon shift.

Overall, NDC 3.0 reflects pragmatic ambition, whose success will hinge on effective delivery. Embedding the NDC within national development planning, linking it to jobs and investment, and maintaining transparent progress reporting will determine its credibility. Bangladesh has long stood as a strong moral voice for climate justice. If it can now pair that voice with tangible implementation of its commitments, it will offer the world a new model of climate-responsible development—a proof that even the most climate-vulnerable nations can pursue prosperity without compromising the planet.

## Save the future of our mango growers



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Naogaon, a district historically renowned for rice cultivation, has emerged over the past decade as a leading mango producer, bringing prosperity to thousands. Yet, this success is now under threat from rising costs, systemic failures in local administration and the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

Soheb Rana of Naogaon, a Master's graduate from Rajshahi University and a former journalist in Dhaka, returned to his village in 2013 to begin mango farming. Starting with just 12 bighas, he and his brother now cultivate nearly 200 bighas, producing more than 450 tonnes of mangoes this year with a market value exceeding Tk 1 crore. Recently, he obtained the Bangladesh GAP certificate for toxic-free mango farming and is now preparing to export his produce to Europe.

According to the DAE, mango cultivation in Naogaon has surged from under 6,000 hectares in 2015 to more than 30,300 hectares today. In 2024 alone, farmers in the district harvested around four lakh tonnes of mangoes, with a market value of Tk 3,000 crore. This shift has been driven largely by the fact that thousands of hectares of high, arid land across the district's nine upazilas are unsuitable for paddy

cultivation due to declining water levels. Farmers who once earned a meagre Tk 7,000-8,000 per bigha from a single season of paddy—barely enough to cover production costs—are now reaping annual profits of Tk 50,000 to Tk 1 lakh from mango cultivation on the same land.

This economic pivot has triggered a dramatic socio-economic transformation. The expansion of mango orchards has not only boosted farmers' incomes but also stimulated local development. Land values around Sapahar town have reportedly risen 60 to 80 times over the last decade, spurring the establishment of quality private schools, colleges, and clinics, and further enhancing the quality of life.

Yet, beneath this success lies growing anxiety. Many farmers are considering abandoning mango cultivation due to sharply rising production costs. The once-lucrative profits from a bigha of Amrapali mangoes, which previously ranged from Tk 1 lakh to Tk 1.5 lakh, have been eroded by soaring expenses. Annual pesticide costs per bigha have more than doubled, from Tk 5,000-10,000 to Tk 25,000-30,000. Similarly, the cost of leasing a bigha of land for 12 years has jumped from Tk

10,000 to Tk 28,000.

A more pressing threat is the continuous onslaught of pests and insects. Reportedly, for the past three years, orchards have been plagued by an insect known as thrips, which blackens mangoes and renders them unsaleable at a desirable price. Farmers lament that no currently available pesticide or insecticide has proven effective against it.

On top of this, farmers face financial exploitation. When selling mangoes at Sapahar Bazaar, they must pay Tk 80 per maund as a "depot fee" to depot owners, in addition to Tk 6 toll per maund to the local district administration as khajna. Furthermore, this toll reportedly increases every year, according to the local upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) and the agriculture officer of Sapahar.

Additionally, the unethical practice known as *dholan*, which forces farmers to give an extra 10-12 kg of mangoes free for every maund sold, has been causing a significant financial loss. Although a directive abolishing this practice was issued on June 11 by the Rajshahi division commissioner, traders continue to ignore it. Combined with alleged syndicate activities and extortion by local political figures, this leaves farmers and traders in an increasingly vulnerable position.

The sector has made remarkable progress, with farmers now harvesting mangoes from March to September, and some varieties like Katimon being available year-round. However, systemic mismanagement in key production hubs and high cost of air freight threaten to undermine these achievements.

While Bangladesh produces 25-27 lakh tonnes of mangoes annually, exports remain disproportionately low, with only 2,167 tonnes shipped by August this year. The primary obstacle is the high cost of air freight to Europe—Tk 600 per kg—compared with Tk 150-200 per kg for competitors like India and Pakistan. Bangladesh's reliance on costly passenger flights instead of dedicated cargo aircraft significantly undermines its export potential. Experts suggest that introducing seasonal cargo flights could raise exports to at least 20 percent of national output, helping to secure the dreams of thousands of growers from collapse.

According to agricultural experts, up to 30 percent of Bangladesh's mangoes are lost annually at various stages. By contrast, countries such as Vietnam have built multi-billion-dollar export industries by processing mangoes into high-value products like jams, jellies, mango bars, powders, and pulp. With the right technology and training, the government could empower farmers and unemployed youth to convert this waste into both a new source of foreign exchange and employment.

Safeguarding the future of the mango sector requires urgent, multifaceted action. Local authorities must work alongside farmers to reduce production costs and curb exploitative practices. To minimise post-harvest losses, cooling vans and temporary cold storage facilities in the northern districts are essential. Most critically, the government must prioritise export infrastructure, such as establishing cargo facilities at Saidpur or Rajshahi airports, to make the progress of the sector sustainable in the long run.

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