

Yunus’s address merits serious reflection

We urge all parties to rise above narrow partisan interests

Within hours of Prof Yunus’s address to the nation outlining a way out of the persistent deadlock on July charter, our political parties started expressing their dissent, creating doubts as to whether they have really examined the merits of his assertions. Do they constitute the best possible solution? No. Do they address all underlying issues? No. But they are the most practical and doable ones at the moment. So, political parties shouldn’t be so prompt in rejecting the chief adviser’s suggestions.

His proposal for holding the election and the referendum on the same day is both sensible and practical. Jamaat’s demand for the latter to be held on a separate day boggles the mind, given the logistical challenges it would entail. Moreover, no explanation has been provided as to what the problem would be if both were held on the same day. We hope Jamaat accepts this proposal.

The suggestion regarding the formation of an Upper House on the basis of proportional representation (PR) of votes received through a free and fair election also seems the best option for Bangladesh. The idea of a second chamber in parliament is to restrain the arbitrariness of the majority party in the lower house. We have had too many instances where the majority party made laws that suited them, and even amended the constitution at will—the abolition of the caretaker system through the 15th Amendment in 2011 being a case in point. Therefore, the upper house should not be a mirror reflection of the lower house if it is to exert any restraint on it. A balance of power between the two chambers is necessary. We hope the BNP sees the merit of this change.

The NCP’s central demand that a decision must be taken to implement the July charter has now been met. A gazette has been issued addressing all the legal aspects of this issue. But for them to state that they do not accept it because the president signed it is really throwing a spanner in the works of the charter’s implementation. Our focus should be to lay the groundwork for its execution.

Naturally, differences between political parties are bound to exist. In fact, they are a healthy feature that encourages innovation in politics. We want differing ideas to percolate through our political discourse. But the existing habit of issuing ultimatums and threatening sit-ins and street agitations whenever demands are not met will only lead to further confrontation. We must move away from this habit.

The nearly nine months of dialogue held by the National Consensus Commission seem to have amounted to very little, as again evidenced by the instant political reactions to Prof Yunus’s address. We believe political parties should take a more serious look at it. The election is only a few months away, and we need to focus entirely on holding it in the freest and fairest manner possible. We urge all parties to take a practical view of things and come together in a way that will restore confidence among the people that we are finally set on the path to restoring democracy and rule by an elected government.

Ensure quality medical education

Recent seat cuts reflect poor state of many medical colleges

The government’s decision to cut the number of seats in public and private medical colleges appears to be a well-considered move, given the long-standing crisis in ensuring quality medical education. According to the 2025–26 admission circular, the total number of seats has been reduced by 572, with 5,100 seats across 37 government medical colleges (down from 5,380) and 6,001 seats in 66 private medical colleges (down from 6,293). Reportedly, the health ministry made the decision after conducting a comprehensive assessment of all medical colleges considering their infrastructure, teacher-student ratio, hospital facilities, and other criteria. While the government’s intention to improve standards is commendable, the approval of a new private medical college with 50 seats raises questions.

The country’s medical colleges, both public and private, have been struggling with numerous crises for years, including a severe shortage of teachers. According to a recent report, 43 percent of teaching posts in government medical colleges remain vacant, jeopardising medical education. Earlier this year, students of Sher-e-Bangla Medical College in Barishal took to the streets protesting the acute teacher shortage. Another report revealed that a lack of classrooms, overcrowding, and insufficient hands-on training have posed major challenges for students of Habiganj Medical College. Reportedly, even after around seven years, the college has yet to provide practising opportunities for intern doctors, which is most unfortunate. Situations in private medical colleges are even worse, with many lacking the infrastructure and resources for adequate academic activities.

The previous administration increased the number of seats by 1,030 for the 2023–24 session, a move that was widely criticised. Many new colleges were also established during the Awami League’s 15-year tenure. After the fall of the AL last year, the interim administration announced plans to rationalise seat allocations to uphold academic standards. Therefore, reducing seats was long overdue. The authorities have also suspended student enrolment at six private medical colleges this year, which is indeed a bold decision.

However, the quality of medical education cannot be ensured by merely cutting seats or suspending enrollments. The government must focus on addressing the persistent teacher shortage, upgrading infrastructure and laboratory facilities, and providing the necessary resources to support both students and faculty. Additionally, strict enforcement of academic standards is essential to ensure that graduates are well-trained and competent. Only through such comprehensive measures can the country build a robust healthcare system and uphold the integrity of its medical education.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

BBC begins radio broadcast

On this day in 1922, BBC begins daily radio broadcasts from the 2LO transmitter at Marconi House.

Five hours of work, three hours of gratitude



NO STRINGS ATTACHED

Aasha Mehreen Amin
is joint editor at The Daily Star.

AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

Lately, my newsfeed has been ablaze with outrage over certain remarks by the head of Jamaat-e-Islami. His latest statement is that if his party comes to power, women will work for five hours but be paid for eight, with the employers footing five, the government kindly covering the other three. How generous! And for women who choose not to work outside the home? They will be anointed as “Rotnogorbha mothers” (women who give birth to successful offspring). As for the rebellious ones who dare to work a full eight hours? They will be “respected.” Magnanimity personified!

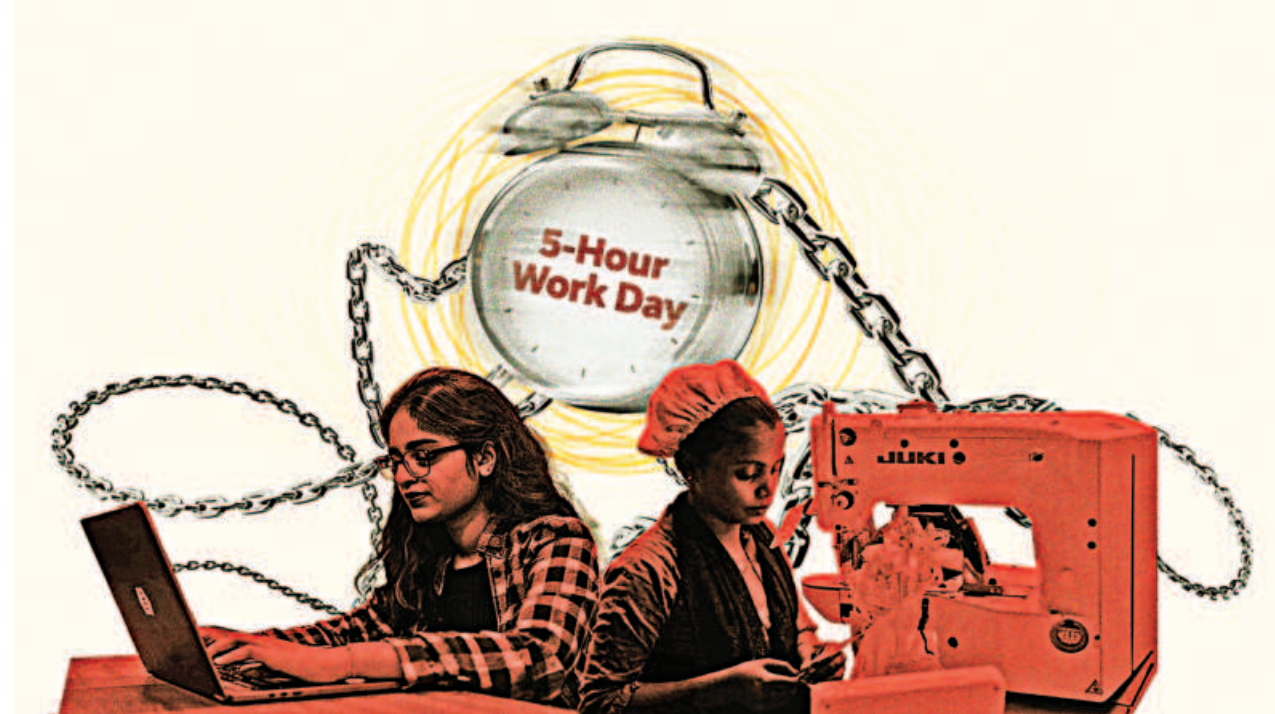
All this should not have been a cause to get our eyebrows in permanent scowls, but somehow these words just don’t sit well in the stomach. First of all, why this attempt to micromanage women’s working hours? After managing to elbow us out of all discussions on the future of our country, why this encroachment on how long we should work? Should the government decide how many hours women should work, or should women decide that for themselves?

They work to contribute to family income, to pay for parents’ treatment, to put food on the table, send children to school, and yes, to meet their own needs. *Why are we even explaining this in the year 2025?* It feels like we have time-travelled to an era when it was considered “unseemly” for women to earn a living.

It is not about easing women’s burden as so charmingly hinted. It is about making them invisible. *The idea* is to let her spend more time cooking, cleaning and tending to her children and husband. But dear saviours of womanhood, here’s a newsflash: she is already doing all that and bringing home a pay cheque. In today’s economy, few families survive on a single income.

Then there are women who are the sole breadwinners of the family. According to Bangladesh Bureau

of Statistics (BBS), 17.4 percent of households were headed by women in 2022, up from 16 percent the year before and 15 percent in 2020. Being widowed at an early age, husband’s chronic illness or disability, being abandoned by husband, divorced, having a husband who just refuses to work or is a drug addict—there are a myriad of reasons why a woman does



VISUAL: SHAIKH SULTANA JAHAN BADHON

not have a husband to rely on. Working is for survival, to feed the family.

And what if it is not for survival but because a woman wants to utilise her degree, her creativity and her intelligence, or just wants to be financially independent? If women are limited to working only five hours, why would any employer want to hire employees who will work fewer hours? Who will take on the extra three?

This is not “honouring” women, it

medicine, banking, law, or in the RMG sector. How will hospitals run without women nurses?

At present, around 43 percent of working-age Bangladeshi women participate in the labour market, not the most ideal percentage, but at least a considerable presence. Latest BBS statistics show that a very large number of women have dropped out of the workforce due to various factors, with a decline in the number of jobs

COP30: Why is gender justice still a footnote?



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FARAH KABIR

As the world gathers in Belém, Brazil, for the 30th Conference of the Parties (COP30) under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), a sobering truth becomes increasingly clear: the promise of gender justice as part of climate justice remains unfulfilled.

Acknowledged in rhetoric, excluded in reality, gender equality still sits at the margins of climate finance and policy 10 years after the Paris Agreement (PA). The result is a climate architecture that continues to privilege fossil fuels and corporate projects while neglecting the women and communities who live the crisis every day.

The PA committed nations to ensure that climate action is “gender-responsive, participatory, and equitable.” The Lima Work Programme on Gender and the Gender Action Plan under the UNFCCC were designed to turn this into real inclusion and funding. Yet, gender justice has been treated as an afterthought, a side event topic, not a policy priority. The data makes this painfully clear.

According to ActionAid’s 2024 “Fund Our Future” report, only 2.8 percent of multilateral climate finance for mitigation supports just transitions that prioritise workers, women, and affected communities. The report calls this “jaw-droppingly under-funded,” warning that climate funds are “failing the people they claim to serve while subsidising the polluters who caused the crisis.”

This failure is not abstract. It is visible

in every village where women farmers are battling saltwater intrusion, every informal worker displaced by climate disasters, and every community are still waiting for adaptation funds that never arrive.

The problem is structural, not accidental. As the Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) notes, “Feminist climate finance means resourcing solutions defined by women, Indigenous peoples, and grassroots movements—not trickle-down projects managed by distant intermediaries.”

But global climate finance still operates through complex, top-down systems—large loans, multilateral channels, and co-financing requirements that exclude grassroots actors. Decision-making remains concentrated in institutions far removed from the communities most affected by climate breakdown.

Meanwhile, public money continues to prop up the fossil fuel economy. Global fossil fuel subsidies and investments exceed hundreds of billions of dollars annually, dwarfing adaptation budgets. Every dollar spent sustaining fossil dependence is a dollar stolen from the future of the planet and from the women and communities holding the line against climate chaos.

This isn’t a moral appeal alone; it’s an argument for effectiveness. Research consistently shows that gender-responsive climate policies deliver better outcomes like greater resilience, stronger adaptation, and

deeper community participation. Women are not “victims” of climate change; they are key actors in climate solutions.

Across Bangladesh and the Global South, women lead cooperatives in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and disaster preparedness. Yet, these efforts operate on shoestring budgets, excluded from international finance streams and national decision-making. Ignoring gender justice doesn’t make climate policy neutral; it makes it ineffective.

The COP30 must mark a turning point—from rhetorical inclusion to financial redistribution and structural reform. Three priorities are urgent: (i) the new UNFCCC Gender Action Plan must come with measurable finance targets. Governments must earmark dedicated funding for gender-responsive adaptation and just transition programmes—not symbolic commitments buried in technical annexes; (ii) public money must stop subsidising the fossil fuel industry and instead fund the communities confronting its consequences. Fossil fuel phase-out and gender-just financing must be negotiated together—not separately; (iii) the system must be simplified and made accessible to women’s rights organisations, Indigenous movements, and community-based groups. Dedicated grant windows and direct funding mechanisms should replace bureaucratic barriers.

Without these shifts, the Gender Action Plan will remain another well-intentioned document—underfunded, unimplemented, and ultimately meaningless.

For Bangladesh, one of the most climate-vulnerable nations and a global voice for equity, COP30 offers an opportunity to lead by example. Gender justice must not be a footnote in its delegation brief; it should define its negotiation agenda.

available being a major one. This is not good news for a developing economy, and you don’t have to be a feminist to realise that. Equal participation of men and women inevitably allows an economy to grow and thrive. It is plain common sense and a fact in the modern era. All over the world, countries are adopting policies to make work environments more conducive to women with better child care facilities, longer maternity and paternity leaves, work from home options and so on. Even in Bangladesh, organisations and companies have adopted these changes to encourage more women to join.

So, before making these proclamations about “what would be best for us,” self-appointed saviours

must wake up from their Rip Van Winkle slumber. We are in 2025, not 1825. Let women decide whether they want to work five hours or eight, or be stay-at-home moms (who, by the way, work 24-7 without any pay and very little recognition, if any). This is what is called choice, which is part and parcel of a democracy—something all political parties claiming to serve the “new Bangladesh” would do well to remember.

Bangladesh should push for a dedicated allocation within the new climate finance goal that guarantees direct access for women-led and community-based organisations. This could include advocating for a minimum percentage of adaptation funds to be earmarked for gender-responsive initiatives.

The country can demand that global mitigation funding, especially for energy transition, include mandatory social and gender justice safeguards. As Bangladesh transitions from coal and gas towards renewables, ensuring that women workers and communities benefit from new green jobs and energy access must be part of its national model.

Bangladesh can push for reforms in the Green Climate Fund and other multilateral channels to reduce complexity, remove co-financing barriers, and enable direct access for local women’s groups. It could pilot such mechanisms domestically and showcase results internationally.

We should institutionalise gender budgeting in all climate-related ministries and ensure that their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plan (NAP) reflect gender equality as a measurable goal. That would strengthen its credibility as a leader on gender-responsive governance.

By building alliances with countries from the Global South, especially those with strong feminist movements such as Kenya, the Philippines, and Colombia, Bangladesh can amplify its voice for systemic change in climate finance architecture.

COP30 in Belém must not be another conference of promises. It must be the moment the world finally funds the future it has long promised—one built on justice, equality, and shared power. Because when women lead, climate action works. And when justice is sidelined, so is hope.