

An inevitable verdict

It may provide some closure for the victims

The International Crimes Tribunal-1 has sentenced deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina and former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal to death for crimes against humanity committed during the mass uprising last year. The tribunal has also sentenced former police chief Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun, who is a state witness and has pleaded guilty, to five years' imprisonment. The case concerns the brutal killing of what the UN estimates to be around 1,400 protesters during the July-August uprising.

Sheikh Hasina was sentenced to death on two charges. She received the death penalty for Charge 4, concerning the shooting and killing of six unarmed protesters in Dhaka's Chankharpul on August 5 last year. Charge 5 relates to the shooting of six student protesters in Ashulia on the same day—five of whom were later burned after death, while the sixth was allegedly set on fire while still alive.

Hasina was also sentenced to imprisonment until natural death for making inflammatory remarks and ordering the use of deadly weapons against protesting students. Under Charge 2, she was found guilty of ordering the killing of student protesters through the use of helicopters, drones, and lethal weapons. According to the tribunal, Asaduzzaman was sentenced to death on two charges. Prosecutors filed five charges against the accused, including failure to prevent murder, amounting to crimes against humanity under Bangladeshi law. They also asked the tribunal to confiscate the assets of all three defendants, if convicted, and distribute them among the victims' families.

The court's conclusion regarding Sheikh Hasina's superior command responsibility in the execution of the atrocities by subordinates, including the police forces, has been well established. The UN Human Rights Commission's report also corroborates this. Videos, verified by international organisations and media, of law enforcers and security forces shooting down unarmed protesters have evidenced the brutal and deliberate use of excessive force. The deaths of small children who happened to be in the line of fire when security forces shot from helicopters have been widely reported by the media, including our own paper. Audios of telephone conversations provide further reinforcement of the allegation that the former PM, along with her aides, was complicit in planning the crackdown and instructing subordinates to carry it out in the cruelest way. As the tribunal has found, none of the accused took any steps to prevent the atrocities committed by law enforcers, nor did they take any measures against them after the fact. Given such compelling facts, the verdict was inevitable.

For the families of the martyrs, as well as the thousands of protesters who have been permanently disabled by the horrific shootings during the uprising, the verdict against the former prime minister and former home minister may provide some measure of closure. We hope that, as the cases under the ICT continue, all legal steps are taken for the sake of transparency and fairness.

Rise in fertility rate concerning

Govt needs to revise its policies for population control

The rise in the country's fertility rate, as revealed in the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2025, should serve as a wake-up call for policymakers. After decades of remarkable progress, bringing the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) down from 6.3 in 1975 to 2.3 by 2012, the rate has now increased to 2.4. This reversing trend is worrying. Experts warn that without effective family planning and population policies, it could negatively impact the country's economy, education, health, and overall development.

The survey shows that contraceptive use among married women has fallen from 62.7 percent in 2019 to 58.2 percent, while access to modern methods has also declined, with 73.5 percent of women's needs met, compared to 77.4 percent in 2019. Moreover, the rise in fertility occurs alongside some other worrying social indicators. For instance, child marriage, though reduced to some degree over time, still remains alarmingly high. Reportedly, the rate of child marriage among girls under 18 in Bangladesh is still 56 percent, which is unacceptable. Moreover, the number of adolescent girls aged 15-19 who have already had children has risen sharply, from 83 percent in 2019 to 92 percent. Teenage childbearing is clearly one of the major contributors to the rising fertility rate.

The survey also highlights some meaningful progress in health and nutrition. For example, institutional deliveries have risen to 71 percent, and skilled birth attendance has reached 77 percent, marking significant improvements in maternal health. The under-five mortality rate has fallen from 40 to 33 per 1,000 live births, while infant mortality has improved from 34 to 29 per 1,000. These gains show that well-designed interventions can deliver results, giving hope that renewed efforts in family planning can reverse the current trend as well.

We, therefore, urge the government to revise its family planning programmes and policies and take coordinated action across ministries. It must immediately strengthen its family planning services, including ensuring an uninterrupted contraceptive supply, rebuilding outreach networks, and restoring strong community-level engagement. Preventing child marriage must also be prioritised, with necessary support systems and incentives to keep adolescent girls in school. Awareness campaigns targeting young couples, especially in poverty-affected areas, are equally essential. Without such urgent interventions, the decades of progress made in population control and management risk being undone.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Push-button telephones come to market



On this day in 1963, the first push-button (Touch-Tone) telephones debuted in the United States, eventually replacing most rotary-dial models.

It is time Bangladesh pursued inclusive growth



MACRO MIRROR
Dr Fahmida Khatun is executive director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue. Views expressed in this article are the author's own.

FAHMIDA KHATUN

Emerging from the ruins of the war of independence in 1971 with a devastated economy, Bangladesh has gradually transformed into a vibrant lower-middle-income country, which is poised to graduate from the Least Developed Country (LDC) status in November 2026. Over the years, factors such as remittances, exports, agriculture, small enterprises, microfinance, and the increasing participation of women in the labour force have played crucial roles in poverty alleviation and improving several human development indicators of the country.

Yet, behind the success lies an emerging set of concerns. Income inequality has increased, urban poverty is becoming more complex, and a series of external shocks, including the pandemic, the Ukraine war, global price volatility, climate impacts, and persistent inflation, have revealed deep-rooted structural vulnerabilities. For Bangladesh, the issue is not about the rate of growth, but whether growth can be inclusive.

Bangladesh's fight against poverty has indeed been one of its notable achievements. Rural households gained from expanded irrigation, the adoption of high-yielding crop varieties, better connectivity, and the growth of non-farm enterprises. Women's employment, particularly in the ready-made garment sector, provided millions with stable incomes and greatly increased their independence. Microfinance institutions helped poor households smooth their income, invest in livestock or small shops, and send their children to school. Remittances from migrant workers offered financial stability to rural families.

However, poverty reduction faces specific limitations. Nationwide, 85 percent of workers are employed in the informal sector, characterised by limited job security and a lack of social protection, which makes households very vulnerable to shocks. High inflation, particularly food inflation, has decreased real incomes, causing many families that had escaped poverty to fall back below the poverty line or remain just above it.

Inequality, meanwhile, continues to grow in noticeable ways. According to the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2022, the national income Gini coefficient increased from 0.482 in 2016 to 0.499 in 2022, indicating that

income distribution is becoming more unequal. The HIES 2022 shows that the richest of the rich—the top five percent of households—possess 30.04 percent of the total national income, while the poorest of the poor—the bottom five percent—hold just 0.37 percent. In 2016, the top five percent's income share was 27.82 percent, whereas that of the bottom five percent was only 0.23 percent of the total national income.

Besides, urban-rural disparities remain significant. Cities are expanding through higher-



ILLUSTRATION: BIPLOB CHAKROBORTY

productivity services and industries, while rural communities continue to depend on low-return agriculture and informal employment. Inequities in access to education, healthcare, technology, and financial resources are widening these gaps. Children from poorer households are more likely to attend poor-quality schools, suffer from undernutrition, and have limited chances to develop skills needed for modern labour markets. This hampers human development progress.

Meanwhile, food security shows a mix of progress and new risks. Bangladesh has more than doubled its food grain output in the past 30 years, thanks to advances in agricultural research, irrigation, and policy incentives. However, food security depends as much on access as on availability. Climate change now poses the greatest threat to that access. Agricultural land is endangered by rising salinity, coastal inundation,

this allocation includes various other components—such as pensions for government employees, interest on national savings certificates, and agricultural subsidies—not targeted at the poor and vulnerable. Excluding these, the share of the SSN allocation stands at just 1.03 percent of GDP in FY2026. In addition to the insufficient allocation relative to the needs of the poor, several limitations, such as targeting errors, overlapping programmes, outdated beneficiary lists, and limited coverage of the urban poor and informal workers, curtail the overall impact. Strengthening the system demands a unified social registry, digital identification and payment systems, improved targeting, and expanded coverage. Over time, Bangladesh will need to increase social protection spending while enhancing efficiency and transparency.

The classical Kuznets hypothesis, proposed by economist Simon Kuznets,

Is climate change intensifying fires in Bangladesh?



Abdul Kader Mohiuddin
is an alumnus of the Faculty of Pharmacy at Dhaka University.

ABDUL KADER MOHIUDDIN

Bangladesh is facing a growing fire crisis. Data from the Department of Fire Service and Civil Defence, compiled by Dataful, shows roughly 250,000 fires occurred nationwide between 1997 and 2018. The trend is accelerating: over 24,000 incidents were reported in 2022, jumping to more than 26,600 by 2024. Over the past two decades, fires have claimed nearly 2,650 lives and left more than 13,000 injured.

In recent times, three massive fires in Dhaka and Chattogram have caused loss of life and billions of dollars, starkly revealing persistent shortcomings in safety standards, infrastructure maintenance, and emergency preparedness. However, climate shifts may also have a major role in fire hazards, as seen in other countries.

Rising global temperatures, caused by human-driven greenhouse gas emissions, have increased the risk of wildfires worldwide, as evidenced by the record-breaking US fires of 2017–2018 and in 2024–2025. Experts warn that extreme heat, prolonged droughts, and erratic rainfall will increasingly

contribute to large fires across the globe, adding to the risks from poor maintenance and regulatory failures.

In January 2025, unusually severe fires swept Los Angeles, fueled by dry conditions and powerful Santa Ana winds. The deadly wildfires were twice as likely and burned an area 25 times bigger than they would have in a world without global warming. Reports suggested that over 50,000 acres burned and around 16,000 structures were damaged, forcing authorities to advise more than 180,000 people to evacuate.

The same erratic pattern has made summer blazes in southeastern Europe up to ten times more likely. Between March 2024 and February 2025 alone, more than 3.7 million square kilometres of land—an area larger than India—went up in flames. Over 100 million people were affected, with homes and infrastructure worth \$215 billion at risk.

Climate scientists from World Weather Attribution at Imperial College London say climate change—through reduced rainfall, parched

vegetation, and extreme winds—intensified both the severity and likelihood of these fires in the US and Europe.

According to experts, dry weather and dusty winds heighten fire risks by creating highly flammable conditions. Low humidity and parched fuels, combined with strong winds, significantly increase the likelihood and rapid spread of fires, often prompting high fire danger alerts.

The May 2025 fires in central Israel were intensified by prolonged heat, drought, and strong winds, which fuelled the rapid spread of fire. Officials linked the extreme conditions to broader climate change trends, showing how firefighting efforts were stretched beyond capacity.

In October 2025, the National Weather Service issued a Red Flag Warning as strong winds of 60 mph and critically low humidity drove high fire risk across Colorado's Eastern Plains and Front Range, recalling the deadly East Troublesome Fire in October 2020.

A recent study published in *Nature Cities* reveals that rising temperatures could heighten urban fire risks across 2,847 cities in 20 countries, including the US, UK, Australia, New Zealand, and China, threatening buildings, vehicles, and outdoor spaces. Drawing on historical records and Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) climate scenarios, the research finds that each one-degree Celsius increase in temperature drives a 4.7 percent rise in outdoor fires and

suggests that inequality tends to rise during early development as economies shift from agriculture to industry, and then decline as more people gain access to education and modern employment opportunities. However, recent evidence indicates that inequality does not necessarily fall automatically. Since the 1980s, inequality has increased in many countries due to skill-biased technological change, financialisation, declining labour bargaining power, globalisation without adequate compensation, and the concentration of wealth among elites. Markets alone cannot address inequality. Policy decisions such as taxation, social protection, labour laws, education, and regulatory measures impact distributional outcomes.

Besides, the “capability approach” introduced by Nobel Laureate economist Professor Amartya Sen in the 1980s shifted the concept of poverty from simple income deprivation to a broader understanding encompassing health, education, empowerment, and agency. The multidimensional poverty framework, now widely adopted globally, emphasises that poverty involves multiple disadvantages, such as poor schooling, unsafe housing, malnutrition, lack of access to clean energy, and social exclusion. Factors like gender, ethnicity, geography, and social class all influence who remains in poverty.

Viewed from these perspectives, Bangladesh's dual reality becomes evident. The country has made considerable progress, but the foundations of inclusive development remain uneven. Bangladesh must now emphasise not only the pace of growth but also its quality, inclusiveness, and resilience.

That means investing heavily in education and skills so that young people from all backgrounds can access more productive work. It involves promoting meaningful jobs in manufacturing and services across all cities and lagging regions beyond Dhaka. It also entails adopting a more progressive tax system where the wealthy pay a fairer share to fund public services. Additionally, it includes modernising food markets and employing digital tools to improve transparency in procurement, stocking, and distribution. Finally, it means incentivising private investment in climate-resilient agriculture through salt-tolerant seeds, flood-tolerant rice, efficient irrigation, storage, and insurance.

And most importantly, it involves recognising that poverty and inequality reduction, and food security cannot be tackled in isolation. These issues are interconnected and must be addressed through a coherent strategy rooted in equity, good governance, and strong institutions.

a 2.5 percent rise in vehicle fires. High-emission warming can potentially boost outdoor fires and vehicle fires by 22 percent and 11 percent, respectively, by the year 2100.

Urban areas are particularly vulnerable, as hotter, drier weather directly fuels faster-spreading fires, overwhelming emergency services and threatening infrastructure.

Pollution, urban heat from rapid urbanisation, poor infrastructure, and regulatory gaps are all fuelling more frequent and intense fires, as trapped atmospheric heat raises temperatures, disrupts weather patterns, and worsens drought conditions.

In Bangladesh, experts link the higher pollution levels in Dhaka and Chattogram to their dense concentration of industries, commercial hubs, and employment opportunities. As the country's main economic centres, both cities suffer from severe air pollution caused by industrial emissions, traffic, construction, household fuel use, and open air waste burning.

The growing influence of major climatic shifts on urban environments necessitates a focused investigation into the rising incidence of devastating fires across Bangladesh, especially in key cities such as Dhaka and Chattogram. Consequently, a proactive and interdisciplinary approach, merging rigorous scientific analysis with robust policy frameworks, is crucial to understanding these complex dynamics and mitigating the risk of future large-scale emergencies.