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Antibiotic resistance must not be ignored

Latest official data raise serious concerns

The latest official data on antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is deeply alarming: four in every 10 patients admitted to intensive care units (ICUs) are no longer responding to antibiotic treatment. The scale and severity of this health threat—revealed after a surveillance of 96,477 patients between July 2024 and June 2025 by the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR)—highlight serious shortcomings and a stark lack of prioritisation in our response. Even more concerning is the finding that multidrug-resistant pathogens in ICUs have reached a prevalence of 89 percent. There is little doubt that any extrapolation of these data to the national level, covering millions of patients, would paint an even grimmer picture.

According to our report on the latest survey, overuse and misuse of antibiotics have significantly reduced their efficacy. This persists despite laws restricting the sale of antibiotics without a prescription. Experts also warn about the sporadic use of antibiotics in poultry, fisheries, and agriculture—practices that introduce resistant bacteria into the food chain and ultimately harm the population. The cumulative effect of these can be understood from another recent survey by icddr,b that revealed widespread colonisation with drug-resistant pathogens in both communities and hospitals, with newborns being particularly vulnerable. In neonatal ICUs, 81 percent of newborns were colonised with carbapenem-resistant Klebsiella pneumoniae, most of them acquiring it after 48 hours in hospital.

The IEDCR surveillance report notes that the use of "watch group" antibiotics—meant to be prescribed only when first-line drugs fail—has risen from 77 percent to 91 percent. These troubling trends indicate that the five-year National Strategy and Action Plan for Antimicrobial Resistance Containment in Bangladesh, adopted in 2023, has not been fully implemented or is facing significant shortcomings. At the very least, public awareness campaigns about the dangers of antibiotic misuse have not achieved the desired impact.

It bears recalling that the World Health Organization's "One Health" strategy, which requires coordinated action across human, animal, and environmental health sectors, demands close cooperation among all relevant agencies. Effective enforcement of drug administration laws in hospitals, clinics, and pharmacies, as well as in food production, along with ensuring proper waste management, hygiene, and sanitation in public spaces, is crucial for meaningful progress.

The latest IEDCR data emphasises the urgent need for the government and medical professional bodies to review the national AMR containment strategy, identify its weaknesses, and intensify their efforts to prevent further escalation of the crisis. Failure to act decisively will lead to more severe illnesses, longer hospital stays, preventable deaths, increased healthcare costs, and substantial losses in productivity.

Protect coastal homes against climate risks

Residents need stronger infrastructure, financial support to cope

We are alarmed by the findings of a new World Bank survey that revealed that more than half of all coastal households in Bangladesh are struggling to adapt to rapid climate change due to insufficient protective infrastructure and limited financial capacity. An alarming 57 percent of surveyed households identified the lack of embankments, cyclone-resistant structures, and other protective infrastructure as the biggest long-term barrier to building climate resilience, while 56 percent cited financial hardship as a major obstacle to implementing stronger adaptation measures. These findings underscore critical weaknesses in our climate change response, leaving millions of people increasingly exposed to worsening climate shocks.

According to satellite data, coastal households experienced flooding 19 times between 2000 and 2018, roughly once a year. In the past decade, however, nearly 75 percent of coastal residents (around 90 percent based on satellite estimates) reported experiencing floods. These repeated climate shocks are depleting people's savings and making long-term recovery increasingly difficult. Moreover, poor and agriculture-dependent households, already living on the margins, are disproportionately affected as rising salinity, extreme heat, and frequent flooding erode their land, crops, and incomes. The report highlights that by 2030, nearly 90 percent of the region's population will be at risk of extreme heat, and almost a quarter will face severe flooding, demonstrating the importance of prompt action by the authorities.

Reportedly, over three-quarters of households are highly aware of climate threats and anticipate a major weather-related shock within the next decade. Although many have taken adaptation measures, most have been forced to rely on low-cost, basic solutions due to limited access to advanced technologies or affordable credit. While government investments in cyclone shelters and embankments have saved countless lives in the past, fiscal constraints now limit its ability to scale up infrastructure at the speed and scope required by the climate crisis. Bangladesh reportedly needs nearly \$12 billion annually for climate adaptation and mitigation, yet the government can currently provide only about \$3.5 billion. This massive financing gap, combined with slow progress on climate-resilient infrastructure and delays in national planning, poses serious risks for the coming decades.

To address these challenges, Bangladesh must adopt a coordinated approach that actively engages both public and private actors. Policymakers can incentivise private investment through risk-sharing mechanisms, climate bonds, and blended finance models that link profitability with long-term social gains. Simultaneously, scaling up early-warning systems, enhancing social protection programmes, and promoting climate-smart agricultural practices will reduce vulnerability at the community level. By integrating innovative risk-financing tools with infrastructure improvements and digital connectivity, the country can create an environment where adaptation becomes financially viable.

Foreign or local, Bangladesh cannot afford a port monopoly

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AHAMEDUL KARIM CHOWDHURY

Bangladesh's ports have always been at the centre of our economic life, shaping our ability to trade, compete, and connect with the world. As the global logistics landscape shifts and the Bay of Bengal takes on new geopolitical weight, the governance of our seaports has become a defining national issue. Foreign operators running terminals is a common practice across advanced and emerging economies. What matters is how a country selects these operators, enforces competition, and safeguards its long-term strategic interests. Foreign participation in port management is not inherently risky, but Bangladesh lacks the regulatory discipline in this sector that other countries—including those criticising us for appointing foreign operators—have long established.

Interestingly, India, whose media has been vocal about Bangladesh's recent port decisions, has itself handed numerous terminals to foreign operators—such as DP World, APM Terminals, PSA, and other international players—years ago. The difference is that India regulates them; their port policy includes explicit competition safeguards. As a result, no single operator can control multiple terminals in the same port region, and in several cases, operators are barred entirely from bidding for adjacent facilities. This ensures that no one company, domestic or foreign, can dominate a port's cargo flow or pricing power. In other words, India's criticism may be politically convenient, but the underlying principle that guides its own policy is sound.

Bangladesh, by contrast, has been moving towards a structure that risks concentration. The proposal to award the New Mooring Container Terminal (NCT)—our most advanced and profitable existing facility—to DP World, while also considering the same operator for one of the major terminals at the new Bay Terminal, effectively gives one foreign entity a dominant position in Chattogram. The concern is not mistrust of foreign firms such as DP World, but ensuring that no single operator, regardless of origin, has excessive control over our national logistics backbone. Globally, ports are among the sectors where monopolies are most closely regulated as efficiency gains can quickly be overshadowed by long-term dependency and loss of bargaining power. Bangladesh has not yet institutionalised these safeguards, which is a serious gap.

It is equally important to recognise the genuine value that foreign operators bring. When the Navy-backed team managed NCT temporarily, productivity rose noticeably within days, proving that managerial discipline, digital processes, and coordinated planning can dramatically improve efficiency without requiring new infrastructure. International operators have technology, systems, global network relationships, and operational depth to lift our performance even further. Their presence is not a threat to sovereignty; it is a chance to modernise. Yet, efficiency alone cannot justify opaque processes or rushed decisions. A strategic asset cannot be leased out with limited public disclosure or competitive bidding. An interim government, in particular, must operate with extra caution because commitments affecting decades should be built on extraordinary transparency and legitimacy.

FILE PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Therefore, the main debate should be whether Bangladesh has created the right framework to invite foreign operators responsibly. A strong framework would begin with transparency. Port concessions are public-interest contracts; their financial terms, performance benchmarks, investment obligations, and dispute mechanisms should be disclosed. Opacity weakens public trust, fuels political suspicion, and diminishes the government's negotiating leverage for future concessions. While certain commercial details may be confidential, most of the agreement should be open to public scrutiny.

Equally essential is competitive tendering. Around the world, top operators prefer bidding in open, rules-based processes because it creates legitimacy and reduces the risk of political friction. Bangladesh has leaned heavily on government-to-government arrangements, which often bypass competition and create the impression—fair or not—that deals are being negotiated privately rather than secured through merit. Terminal operation is not the same as financing a mega-project; it is a commercial service best awarded through competitive processes. If we want the best global players and the best deal for the country, competition is our greatest ally.

The third critical pillar is a competition regime that prevents concentration. Bangladesh should adopt clear anti-monopoly rules, similar to those in India, Singapore, and the European Union (EU). No operator should be allowed to control more than a defined percentage of capacity within a port. Operators that run one terminal in a region should not automatically qualify for another unless a clear competitive case exists. Additionally, future concessions should be distributed across multiple partners to avoid the structural risk of having one actor, foreign or domestic, shaping the logistics flows of the entire country. This kind of diversification is not only a commercial safeguard; in the Bay of Bengal context, it is a strategic imperative.

The geopolitical reality cannot be ignored. Bangladesh sits at the intersection of major global rivalries. China, India, Japan, the US, and the Gulf states all view the Bay of Bengal as critical to their strategic and economic interests. Every port concession, therefore, has geopolitical weight. A balanced mix of partners spreads risk, enhances Bangladesh's negotiating power, and positions the country as a connector rather than a captive. If one state-linked corporation—whether from the Gulf, East Asia, or elsewhere—dominates multiple terminals, Bangladesh's strategic space narrows. Strategic diversification, rather than dependence, is what allows a small state to navigate big power competition with confidence.

Yet, the long-term goal cannot simply be diversified foreign participation. Bangladesh must also build its own capability. Every concession agreement should include mandatory commitments for training, technology transfer, and local managerial development. Ports are becoming digital, data-driven, and increasingly automated. Bangladesh must ensure that its young professionals and engineers gain the skills to eventually lead and innovate in this sector, rather than remain permanently subordinate to foreign expertise. The best global operators are accustomed to such arrangements and often welcome them; it strengthens the operation itself and builds goodwill. We should demand nothing less.

All these concerns—competition, transparency, geopolitics, and capability—have been voiced by experts as well as by young political and civic leaders. Their central message is not opposition to reform, but a call for rules, fairness, and long-term thinking. What they fear is the possibility that modernisation without safeguards will leave Bangladesh more vulnerable, not more empowered.

Bangladesh has an opportunity now to rethink its port governance in a way that aligns efficiency with sovereignty, global expertise with national interest, and foreign participation with domestic capability. If we adopt strong competition rules, enforce transparent bidding, and secure a balanced set of partners, our geography can become a source of enduring strength. Without these, we risk creating dependencies that future generations will have to undo at a great cost. We deserve modernisation that strengthens the country, not shortcuts that weaken its negotiating position. If we are thoughtful, disciplined, and transparent, our ports will not only become more efficient; they will become pillars of national power, economic resilience, and strategic autonomy in a rapidly changing region.

COP30 GENDER ACTION PLAN

A victory without power?

Farah Kabir is country director at ActionAid Bangladesh.

FARAH KABIR

As the curtains fell on COP30 in Belém on November 21, negotiators hailed what they insist is a triumph for multilateralism. At least 195 Parties approved the Belém Package, which includes 29 decisions covering just transition, adaptation finance, trade, gender, and technology. The message from the podium is clear: global cooperation is alive, consensus has been restored, and climate action is set to accelerate in ways that benefit people.

However, without enforceable finance and political will, the Gender Action Plan (GAP) adopted in Belém risks becoming another trophy text—celebrated at signing ceremonies, sidelined in national budgets, and powerless to shift the patriarchal structures that still shape climate governance.

Parties are committed to tripling adaptation finance by 2035, with developed countries expected to significantly boost support for the developing nations, withstanding the worst of climate impacts. The Baku Adaptation Roadmap now sets work until 2028, leading into the next Global Stocktake, the fundamental component of the Paris Agreement. Negotiators also finalised 59 voluntary, non-prescriptive indicators to track progress under the Global Goal on Adaptation across water, food, health, ecosystems, infrastructure, and livelihoods, integrating finance, technology, and capacity-building.

Belém also delivered a Just Transition Mechanism that explicitly places people and equity at the centre of climate responses, aiming to enhance cooperation, technical assistance, capacity building, and knowledge sharing. Meanwhile, the Belém Health Action Plan, endorsed by more than 30 countries and 50 organisations, mobilised \$300 million to strengthen climate-resilient health systems and disease prevention in the Global South.

Taken together, the Belém Package appears comprehensive. It demonstrates that the machinery of multilateralism can still produce agreement. Yet, consensus is not the same as justice. For gender advocates, celebration is tempered by a familiar structural problem: ambition without resources.

The revised GAP, secured through years of feminist advocacy, includes real advances. It enhances support for national gender and climate focal points, promotes gender-responsive budgeting, and recognises structurally excluded groups, including Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and rural women. It mandates guidelines to protect women environmental defenders, opens space to address care work, health, and violence against women, includes gender- and age-disaggregated data, and strengthens coherence with the Rio Conventions and the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). With 27 activities, it provides multiple pathways for implementation, including nationally.

These gains were not gifted; they were fought for. They reflect feminist expertise shaping climate policy.

Yet, they sit alongside stark regressions. Foundational human rights language, central to the Lima Work Programme on Gender, has been removed from the GAP. The intersectional framing activists demanded appears only as a diluted reference to "multidimensional factors," revealing the enduring discomfort with naming systems of oppression. This retreat signals whose experiences are permitted in global climate narratives and whose are erased.

Most critically, the GAP lacks binding indicators and financial guarantees. Without mandatory gender budgeting and enforceable accountability, implementation becomes optional.

This weakness becomes glaring when set against the finance discussions. The much-hyped Baku-to-Belém Roadmap proposes mobilising \$1.3 trillion annually for climate action. Yet, nowhere in the final texts is there a commitment that any meaningful share will reach gender-responsive initiatives or women-led organisations.

The Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage has been celebrated for issuing its first call for proposals totalling \$250 million for 2025-26, with grants of \$5-20 million and approvals expected from mid-2026. But \$250 million is symbolic in a landscape where climate-induced losses reach tens of billions annually. For women, Indigenous peoples, and marginalised communities already losing land, livelihoods, and cultural heritage, symbolism does not rebuild homes or secure futures.

Without mechanisms guaranteeing direct access for women-led and grassroots organisations, the Loss and Damage Fund risks reproducing the same inequalities it claims to address. The feminist critique is clear: climate finance continues to flow through institutions dominated by the same power structures that marginalise those most affected.

This is the central contradiction of Belém. Leaders endorsed a GAP that recognises care systems, environmental defenders, and community leadership, while refusing to anchor those commitments in finance and enforcement. Feminist policy cannot run on rhetorical support and volunteer labour. It demands a redistribution of resources and power.

If COP30 is to be remembered as a turning point, dedicated gender-responsive finance windows must be created for adaptation, loss and damage. Gender indicators must become mandatory within funding decisions. Direct access for women-led and Indigenous organisations must become a standard practice.

Ultimately, the strength of the Belém GAP will depend not on the text agreed upon in Brazil, but on the political decisions that follow. The world has endured too many cycles of declarations followed by underfunded implementation.

Belém promised justice. Without money and courage, it delivers only recognition without power—a feminist victory stripped of the resources needed to transform systems. The question is not whether COP30 secured an agreement, but whether governments will fund the change it promised.

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