

Healthcare workers' strikes cannot continue Government must resolve this crisis responsibly

For two weeks, essential health services and routine vaccination programmes have been disrupted as several groups of health workers, including government nurses, medical technologists, pharmacists, and health assistants, continue demonstrations to press long standing demands. The consequences of such disruptions will be delayed treatment for critical patients, cancellation of basic health services and suspension of newborn registrations and vaccinations, which are essential for preventing disease outbreaks. Such disruptions are unacceptable in any functioning health system.

So why has the health ministry failed to resolve this dispute? The Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) claims that most of the workers' demands have been accepted in principle and that implementation is "in progress." Yet, the workers are not convinced and allege that earlier promises were never fulfilled. This loss of trust has become the core obstacle.

The demands themselves highlight long-standing structural issues. Health assistants seek amendments to recruitment rules, an upgrade of their entry post from grade 16 to grade 14, elimination of salary disparities, and recognition as technical staff. Medical technologists and pharmacists want their entry grade raised from II to IO—reforms they say have been promised before but never delivered. Nurses are also demonstrating over career progression and pay inequities. These demands merit careful consideration. However, prolonged work stoppages in essential services directly endanger lives and violate service regulations designed to protect patients. The threat of a complete shutdown of hospitals, clinics, diagnostic centres, and educational institutions underscores how vulnerable the health system is to administrative delays and inadequate labour-management mechanisms. Healthcare cannot be held hostage to stalled negotiations. This crisis exposes a larger weakness in public administration: a reactive approach that waits for public pressure instead of addressing these issues early, transparently, and with fixed timelines. When negotiations extend indefinitely and commitments are vague, workers lose faith. When health workers walk out, patients suffer.

The government must therefore act swiftly and decisively. If the demands are financially and structurally logical, the relevant ministries should publish a clear implementation roadmap with dates, responsible officials, and measurable steps. If some reforms require budget adjustments or longer timelines, those realities must be communicated openly. Only visible progress can restore credibility. At the same time, health workers must uphold their duty to ensure continuity of essential services. Many countries allow health-sector strikes only under minimum-service requirements. Bangladesh needs similar safeguards to prevent complete shutdowns of critical care and vaccinations. This crisis can be resolved quickly if the government demonstrates clear action and workers respond in good faith. Ultimately, a functional health system relies on trust between authorities, providers, and the public. Rebuilding that trust must begin now.

Ensure fair prices for Aman farmers

Stop imports during peak harvest, buy directly from farmers

We are concerned by the falling paddy prices across the country at a time when Aman harvesting is at its peak. Data from more than a dozen districts show that despite good yields this season, farmers are counting losses instead of profits. Paddy prices have reportedly fallen by Tk 100-150 per maund within just two weeks, leaving many growers unable to recover their production costs. Farmers and traders point to a surge in rice imports during the harvest season as the primary cause behind this sudden price drop. While the country imported no rice in FY 2023-24, it brought in 14.36 lakh tonnes in FY 2024-25—the highest in a decade. This has lowered paddy prices at a time when domestic supply is naturally at its peak.

For farmers, the consequences are severe. Growers like Shakiul Islam in Gaibandha and Sarwar Alam in Dinajpur report production costs of around Tk 1,240 per maund, yet the market is offering only Tk 1,150-1,180. According to the Bogura Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), production costs for one kilogramme (kg) of Aman paddy increased by Tk 1 to Tk 31 compared to last year. Per bigha costs have also risen due to the higher prices of pesticides and fertilisers. Many farmers also allege that prices fall sharply when they sell, but rise once the grain reaches millers and traders. For those who already suffered losses from potato cultivation earlier this year, facing another round of financial uncertainty is particularly troubling. Clearly, the government's decision to delay imports when prices were high, and then to rush imports during the domestic harvest has disrupted the market and pushed prices down artificially. Experts have rightly described this as a management failure. These actions have offered little relief to consumers while causing significant harm to growers. Moreover, the government's procurement target—only 50,000 tonnes at Tk 34 per kg—is far too small to meaningfully support farmers or stabilise prices. Strict quality requirements are also preventing many growers from selling their grain to government silos.

Therefore, to ensure fair prices for Aman growers, the government must take decisive action. Imports should be suspended immediately, at least during the peak harvest period, and domestic procurement must be expanded substantially so that farmers can sell their produce at a better rate. Policies governing imports and procurement should be revised to align with domestic production cycles and protect growers. Last but not least, the government should consider forming an Agricultural Price Commission, as proposed earlier by agricultural experts and policymakers, to ensure fair prices for farmers, maintain market stability, and safeguard consumer interests.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Terry Anderson freed after 6 years in captivity



On this day in 1991, American journalist Terry Anderson, the longest-held Western hostage in Lebanon, was released after nearly six years in captivity, marking a major turning point in the end of a decade-long hostage crisis tied to the Lebanese civil conflict.

COP30 brings both hope and letdowns for vulnerable countries

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

The UN Climate Conference COP30, held from November 10-21 in Belém, Brazil, concluded with a mix of hope and disappointment. The conference was described beforehand as the "Implementation COP." Many, including climate-vulnerable countries like Bangladesh, expected COP30 to deliver concrete actions from empty promises by finally translating money, policies, and clear plans into climate commitments, but no major breakthrough was achieved, particularly in phasing out fossil fuels and advancing climate finance. However, new platforms for cooperation and some valuable opportunities were created, which can benefit countries already experiencing severe impacts from rising temperatures, storms, sea-level rise, and livelihood losses.

Three major tensions shaped almost every part of the conference. First, over 80 countries wanted a clear global plan to phase out fossil fuels, but a few powerful producers blocked it, so the final agreement made no commitment to ending fossil fuels. Second, developing countries said they cannot cut emissions or adapt to climate impacts without reliable financial support from richer nations, but participating countries could not agree on how much money should be provided or by when. Third, poorer, climate-vulnerable nations raised concerns about fairness, fearing that stringent climate actions might slow their economic growth even though they contributed least to the crisis.

Despite these tensions, one key outcome of COP30 was the launch of a two-year Climate Finance Work Programme to advance the "Baku-Belém Roadmap," which aims to mobilise at least \$1.3 trillion annually for developing countries by 2035. Of this, \$300 billion should be provided by public finance from developed nations under Article 9.1 of the Paris Agreement. Although not legally binding, the goal sends a strong political signal that large-scale funding is essential. Without substantial financial support, vulnerable countries cannot adapt to worsening climate impacts or transition to cleaner energy. For countries like Bangladesh, which depend on external support for adaptation, this commitment to

finance is significant, even if it remains uncertain.

Adaptation was a major focus at COP30 as climate impacts are already causing severe damage. The conference agreed to triple global adaptation finance by 2035, but many vulnerable countries were disappointed, wanting the target to be met by 2030. They argued that adaptation cannot wait while storms, floods, droughts and heatwaves worsen each year. The lack of a clear baseline for measuring "tripling" also weakens the pledge. Still, recognising the need to scale up



Delegates engage in tense negotiations at the COP30 in Belém, Brazil, which failed to deliver concrete actions in phasing out fossil fuels and advancing climate finance.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

adaptation is important. Bangladesh spends heavily on resilience, but its budget is insufficient, making international support vital for embankments, housing, crops and early warning systems.

COP30 also adopted 59 global indicators to help track progress on the Global Goal on Adaptation. These indicators cover finance, technology, capacity-building and social inclusion. For the first time, there is a gender-responsive adaptation indicator that recognises that climate impacts differ for women, men, children, and older people. While the adoption of these indicators is a step forward, experts warn that last-minute political compromises weakened their

quality. Some indicators may be too vague to use effectively in national planning. Bangladesh and similar countries should still take advantage of the indicators by aligning them with their national adaptation plans. If appropriately used, these indicators can strengthen the case for receiving more adaptation finance from international sources.

The biggest disappointment for climate-vulnerable countries was the failure of COP30 in adopting a roadmap for phasing out fossil fuels. Scientific evidence indicates that the world cannot limit global warming threshold to 1.5 degrees Celsius without rapidly reducing fossil fuel use. However, in place of a phase-out plan, the conference launched two voluntary initiatives, namely, the Belém Mission to 1.5 degrees Celsius and a Global Implementation Accelerator. These initiatives aim to help countries implement their national climate plans and share best practices. But

millions depend on climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture, fisheries and small industries. For Bangladesh, a just transition could support better planning for cleaner industries, renewable energy jobs and modern skills training for youth. If implemented well, it can help protect communities during the shift away from fossil-fuel-dependent growth models.

The conference also placed renewed attention on forests, land and nature-based solutions. However, the results were limited. Despite being held in the Amazon region, COP30 failed to establish a binding global plan to stop deforestation. The final text only "highlighted" the importance of halting forest loss by 2030. Yet, some encouraging announcements came outside the formal negotiations, including new pledges for forest finance and stronger recognition of Indigenous Peoples. For Bangladesh, protected by the Sundarbans mangrove forest against cyclones and storm surges, nature-based solutions are not optional, but they are essential. This renewed focus on forests can help attract more investment into mangrove restoration, coastal greenbelts, river conservation and biodiversity protection.

Another notable dimension of COP30 was the linkage between climate policy, global trade, and social inclusion. For the first time, trade issues were formally taken up at the COP. Countries agreed to hold three dialogues on how trade measures, including border carbon adjustments, may affect climate action. This is critical for export-dependent countries like Bangladesh. As global markets move towards greener supply chains, Bangladesh will have to adopt cleaner production standards to remain competitive. COP30 also updated the Gender Action Plan, strengthening requirements for gender-responsive climate action. This echoes the reality that women and girls face different and often heavier climate burdens, especially in rural and low-income contexts.

Although COP30 revealed serious gaps between scientific urgency and political action, leaving vulnerable countries exposed to rising seas, deadly heat, water shortages and destructive floods, it should not be dismissed as a failure. The new finance programme, adaptation indicators, just transition mechanism and attention to trade and gender offer frameworks that countries can build upon. However, this global progress will only matter for Bangladesh and other climate-vulnerable countries if national governments act decisively through strengthening adaptation plans, expanding green industries, protecting ecosystems and preparing workers for a low-carbon future.

Slum fires, inequality and Dhaka's invisible residents



Tagabun Taharim Titun
is content executive at The Daily Star.

TAGABUN TAHARIM TITUN

The night was torn by orange flames that rose to the sky after another massive fire—the fourth in two years—ripped through the Bou Bazar area of Dhaka's Korail Slum on November 25. Within hours, the slum was engulfed in flames, injuring many and displacing thousands who stood in the smoking ruins of their belongings, asking, "Where will we go now?"

The slum, jammed between the capital's two major affluent neighbourhoods—Gulshan and Banani—is home to nearly 60,000 families, many of whom live in single rooms that house up to eight people. Although many aid organisations and city agencies rushed in to provide food and immediate shelter to the residents, rebuilding dozens of houses remains a massive task. Yet, many residents reported to their daily work the next morning, even when they did not have a roof over their head anymore. It is because without their daily earnings, they would be lost in the thin line between survival and hunger. Perhaps they knew that short-term aid is no alternative to sustained government action and long-term rebuilding support.

People migrate to Dhaka mostly out of necessity. They come in



Slum fires are not accidents but a predictable by-product of inequality and policy failure.

FILE PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

search of work in factories, services, or construction, drawn by better economic opportunities. Natural disasters fuelled by climate change also push many towards the capital. However, unaffordable housing and a lack of coordinated land-use policy force many to settle and start living in any place they can. Consequently, this unplanned urbanisation and lack of safety protocols in slums create the grounds for fire disasters.

lanes and parked vehicles make it difficult for firefighters to reach all corners inside slums—a problem firefighters also faced in the recent Korail slum fire.

Inequality and uneven development are the main drivers behind the creation of informal settlements like the Korail slum in urban areas. According to the "White Paper on the State of Bangladesh Economy," the country's wealth distribution is extremely

skewed, as the bottom 50 percent of the population owns only five percent of the country's assets. In other words, wealth, jobs and services remain centred among the urban elite. Not only do rural areas get far fewer investments, they often lack better schools, hospitals and, most importantly, jobs.

The informal economy compounds the problem. A 2018 report of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) reveals that the informal economy accounts for 78.2 percent of Dhaka's employment. This adds to the importance of a vastly ignored reality: the need for incorporating a sustainable, comprehensive urban plan for the city where informal settlements must be treated as an integral part. Such a plan will also decrease social inequality, negative health consequences and the adverse impact on the environment.