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Unemployment hindering progress

Create jobs and skills opportunities for youth urgently

With 33 percent of its population aged between 18 and 35, Bangladesh faces a pressing challenge: creating enough jobs for its youth. Unfortunately, joblessness is on the rise, with around 55 lakh young people aged 15 to 24 being economically inactive. This reality is a major threat to Bangladesh's development. The consequences are visible in a surge of teenage gang violence, substance abuse, online gambling, urban crime, and gender-based harassment and violence. A recent policy paper by the General Economics Division (GED) lays out the scale of the crisis and, crucially, how these risks are interconnected. Youth marginalisation and limited access to economic opportunity are at the root of these overlapping problems.

Young people aged 15 to 18 years are particularly vulnerable. An estimated 83 lakh young people are affected by substance abuse. At the same time, online gambling is expanding rapidly as idle youth look for ways to make a quick buck or kill time, many becoming addicted. More than 50 lakh people are already involved, and this number could exceed a staggering two crore by 2027 if left unchecked. Rising urban violence is another warning sign. In 2024, nearly 50 youth gangs were active in Dhaka alone, involved in drug peddling, extortion, and other crimes. Similar patterns are emerging outside the capital. The links are cyclical: gang involvement often leads to substance abuse, which in turn deepens ties to criminal networks. Breaking this cycle requires urgent and coordinated action. Otherwise, what should have been a demographic dividend could turn into a demographic burden.

Meanwhile, current interventions fall far short. Existing training programmes reach only 3.64 percent of economically inactive youth, leaving the vast majority without pathways to employment. In terms of curbing drug addiction among the youth, government plans to add 1,679 rehabilitation beds will help only a fraction of the 83 lakh individuals affected by addiction.

The GED report should be treated as a wake-up call. Bangladesh must place youth development at the centre of its policymaking. This means rethinking employment strategies by creating public works programmes such as environmental cleanups, expanding part-time jobs for students, and scaling up vocational training. Polytechnic institutions need urgent reform, with better teachers and updated curriculum aligned with market demands. At the same time, labour markets should diversify to open doors to higher-paying jobs, both domestically and abroad. Addressing substance abuse will require a parallel expansion of affordable rehabilitation and counselling services. Law enforcement must act against gang activity. Rehabilitation-focused detention and reintegration programmes are essential to help young people rebuild their lives.

There must also be widespread awareness campaigns to teach parents how to nurture their teenage children, to sensitise teachers and youth leaders to be mentors, and to educate young people on the consequences of substance abuse, online gambling, and criminal behaviour. Young people must be made to feel valued by the government, their families, and society. Bangladesh's youth remains its greatest asset, if given the opportunity to thrive.

Early action a must to curb mosquito spread

Authorities must be proactive

It is deeply concerning that the mosquito problem, once seasonal, is becoming a year-round challenge across the country, largely thanks to inadequate and scattered efforts from the authorities concerned. A recent report published by this daily highlighted the dismal situation in Khulna city, where the mosquito population is seeing an increase as temperatures climb. According to Khulna City Corporation (KCC), 56 people are currently engaged in spraying and other anti-mosquito activities, while over 300 cleaners are working to clean up common breeding grounds such as drains and bushes. A Tk 823 crore project on drainage system development is also nearing completion and is expected to reduce the impact of mosquitoes. However, the fact that residents continue to struggle with shopping, studying, cooking, or simply being anywhere without being bitten by mosquitoes underscores the inadequacy of these measures.

The situation is no better in other major cities, as people grapple with mosquito-borne diseases. According to the Directorate General of Health Services' (DGHS) dengue dashboard, hospitals across the country have reported 1,741 cases since the beginning of the year, with 45 cases recorded in the past week alone. Given the potent combination of already high temperatures, intermittent rains, and vacated homes during Eid holiday, entomologists are right to fear a surge in numbers. They also recommend proactive measures such as using insect growth regulators and environmentally friendly microbial insecticides to curb mosquito breeding. But will the authorities act accordingly?

On Saturday, the Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) launched a special three-day campaign across 536 educational institutions under its jurisdiction. Under the campaign, potential sources of stagnant water will be removed or destroyed, larviciding and adulticiding activities will be carried out on school premises and in surrounding areas, and students will be educated on dengue prevention. While this is a commendable initiative on paper, we hope it will not be a one-off event and that the measures introduced during this campaign will continue not only in schools under the DNCC but also be expanded nationwide, especially in more vulnerable areas.

The authorities must remember the lessons from 2025, which not only saw the second-highest number of dengue cases in 25 years but was also the third-deadliest year, with 413 deaths recorded. This year, under a new government that vows to set itself apart, we hope to see proactive steps to curb the spread of mosquito-borne diseases. The authorities must tackle this issue with the seriousness it deserves and ensure that the recommendations of experts are properly incorporated into their action plans.

Chattogram port can no longer delay green transition



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The growing influence of weather and climate science on economic infrastructure deserves closer attention. Ports sit at the frontline of this relationship. Rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, sea-level rise, and extreme weather events increasingly shape how ports operate, plan investments, and manage risks. Climate and environmental data are becoming central to how ports compete and remain resilient in the global maritime economy.

For Bangladesh, as it prepares to graduate from Least Developed Country (LDC) status, protective cushions such as preferential market access, concessional financing, and regulatory flexibility will gradually diminish. In their place will emerge a more demanding global trade environment where environmental performance, carbon accountability, and sustainability credentials increasingly influence access to markets, finance, and investment. In this changing landscape, an important question arises: is the Chattogram Port Authority (CPA) institutionally prepared for this future?

During my 28 years of professional experience at Chattogram Port Authority (CPA), I have never seen a dedicated environmental protection department, a sustainability cell, or even a designated environmental professional responsible for long-term environmental planning and compliance in the CPA. This absence is no longer a minor administrative gap. It is becoming a strategic vulnerability at a port that handles more than 80 percent of Bangladesh's seaborne trade and remains the country's primary maritime gateway.

Ports are far from environmentally neutral spaces. They concentrate emissions, noise, wastewater discharge, oil pollution, and solid waste. Ships burn fuel at berth, trucks queue for hours around the port city, and cargo-handling equipment operates around the clock. Despite this reality, environmental impacts at Chattogram Port remain largely unmeasured and unmanaged in any systematic way.

Globally, port authorities have learned a simple truth: what is not measured cannot be managed. Modern ports routinely conduct emissions inventories, monitor air and water quality, measure carbon output, and conduct environmental audits. Many now deploy digital systems to monitor air pollution, water quality, and noise levels in real time across port areas. At Chattogram Port, however, such practices remain limited

and fragmented. Environmental management is still treated largely as an external compliance obligation rather than a core governance responsibility.

However, after LDC graduation, Bangladesh will face increasing scrutiny from trading partners, international lenders, insurers, shipping lines, and global supply chains. Environmental compliance will increasingly become a condition of doing business rather than simply a donor requirement. Ports will be assessed not only on efficiency and

fragmented and reactive.

Shipping itself is undergoing a major transformation, and ports are central to that shift. Around the world, port authorities promote greener shipping through incentive schemes such as reduced port charges for low-emission vessels, priority berthing for environmentally compliant ships, and penalties for heavy polluters. These measures influence shipping behaviour far more effectively than policy statements. However, for such frameworks to work, they must be supported by reliable environmental data.

Deploying monitoring systems for air emissions, water quality, and noise levels across berths and terminals would allow CPA to move from perception-based compliance to measurable environmental performance. Continuous data could help the CPA provide tariff incentives and priority berthing, linking reduced

practical commitment to sustainability. International experience shows that renewable energy initiatives often work best through public-private partnership (PPP) models, allowing ports to benefit from private investment and expertise while focusing on core operations.

Some argue that the shift toward a landlord port model or donor-funded infrastructure projects will automatically address environmental concerns. This assumption is misleading. Global terminal operators are accountable for individual terminals, not cumulative port-wide impacts such as air pollution, emissions, traffic congestion, or the broader city-port interface. Donor safeguard mechanisms are also project-specific and temporary. They cannot replace permanent institutional capacity. Environmental sustainability, therefore, must be institutionally embedded. This is not



'Ports are far from environmentally neutral spaces as they concentrate emissions, noise, wastewater discharge, oil pollution, and solid waste.'

VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

capacity but also on carbon intensity, pollution control, energy efficiency, and climate resilience. Green shipping corridors, emission disclosure rules, and environmental performance-linked port charges are gradually becoming global norms. If Chattogram Port fails to adapt, it risks losing competitiveness, investment opportunities, and credibility in the evolving maritime economy.

Therefore, environmental sustainability cannot remain an "additional duty" scattered across departments within the CPA. It urgently needs a formal environmental protection and sustainability cell reporting directly to senior management. Such a unit should oversee environmental planning, emissions monitoring, regulatory compliance, audits, and coordination with regulators, development partners, and research institutions. Otherwise, without clear institutional ownership, sustainability initiatives will remain

charges to verified environmental performance rather than self-declared vessel characteristics. CPA already has the authority to design such schemes. What it currently lacks is emissions data, performance benchmarks, and in-house environmental expertise.

Another important intervention is shore power supply, allowing ships to switch off auxiliary engines while at berth and connect to onshore electricity. This can significantly reduce air pollution and carbon emissions in port cities. For a densely populated city like Chattogram, the public health benefits alone justify serious attention. Yet, shore power remains largely absent from CPA's long-term planning.

There is also a major opportunity in renewable energy. CPA operates container freight stations, warehouses, sheds, and administrative buildings—many with large rooftop surfaces suitable for solar panels. Solar power could reduce long-term energy costs, cut emissions, and demonstrate a

strong argument against port expansion but for responsible and future-ready development. That is why the Ministry of Shipping, CPA leadership, policymakers, port users, and development partners must recognise that environmental sustainability now sits at the heart of port governance, trade competitiveness, and public health.

Climate science is no longer only about forecasting storms. It also helps critical infrastructure prepare for an uncertain future. The coming decade will determine whether Chattogram Port evolves into a credible gateway in a carbon-constrained global economy—or struggles to keep pace with a rapidly transforming maritime industry. For Bangladesh, the message is clear: environmental intelligence and climate awareness must now guide port governance. Choosing leadership in environmental sustainability today will cost far less than correcting institutional neglect tomorrow.

Can digitising justice break the cycle of impunity?



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While the seats of power have shifted since the election in February, a much older, darker reality persists for the women and children of Bangladesh. A systemic epidemic of gender-based violence persists in the country, where the very institutions meant to provide justice often act as the primary barrier to it. This isn't just about a few corrupt officers; it is about an entire structure that protects anyone with enough money or political muscle.

To understand the depth of this rot, we need only look back on the visceral horrors that have transpired in recent weeks. On February 24, a six-year-old girl was taken to an under-construction building in Dhaka's Hatirjheel area and was reportedly raped before being murdered. While her family and neighbours protested outside the police station, a familiar fear began to spread: the rumour that influential local figures were already pulling strings to bury the investigation.

On March 1, an eight-year-old girl was found by road workers inside

Sitakunda Eco Park in Chattogram. The perpetrator had slit her throat, severing her windpipe in a literal attempt to silence her. Despite receiving treatment, the child eventually succumbed to her injuries. The perpetrator (a neighbour of the girl's family) was identified, arrested, and jailed, with police confirming the victim has been subjected to attempted rape. Meanwhile, in Narsingdi, a 15-year-old was abducted and murdered in retaliation of her family demanding justice for a previous assault by the same perpetrators. The fact that a former Union Parishad member was among those arrested in connection with the crime shows how political power is often a tool for violence.

In these cases, even when the courts eventually move, they move too slowly. In March 2025, an eight-year-old in Magura died after being raped by her sister's in-laws. The attention this case received in public discourse can be credited for the relatively speedy trial that followed. Unfortunately, for every case that receives justice quickly,

hundreds of cases are quietly discarded because the families were too scared or too poor to fight the system.

The core of the problem is a massive vacuum in our laws. Without a dedicated witness protection law, victims and witnesses are left completely exposed. In rural areas, this allows the *shalish* (village councils) to take over. These councils often resort to "settling" rape cases by forcing the survivor to marry her rapist. This is essentially the state allowing for lifelong domestic torture to take place. This cycle is reinforced by the fact that marital rape is still not a crime in Bangladesh. When the Women's Affairs Reform Commission made recommendations to change this in 2025, rallies were held against the proposed changes, led by right-wing groups, who called the reforms "anti-Islamic." Ultimately, these vital protections were left to languish in legislative limbo.

To break this cycle, we must fix our broken bureaucracy. A key part of the solution can be a publicly accessible justice dashboard—a digital registry allowing any victim or witness to securely log incidents. The first step is anonymous geographic mapping. If a map shows a sudden cluster of child abductions in a specific union, for example, it would become impossible to claim an incident as being isolated. To make sure no one can delete a file or change a statement, the system should

use immutable, blockchain-style digital logging. Every medical report and police action would be timestamped and visible to everyone. If a local officer "loses" a forensics report, the whole country would be able to see who was responsible for the delay.

Finally, we need a fundamental change in how we prosecute these crimes through an evidence-based, irrevocable prosecution process. Perpetrators often intimidate a victim's family into withdrawing their case. They may kidnap relatives or burn down crops until the victim says, "I don't want to testify." In a digitised system, once a case is validated, the state must assume the full burden of prosecution. If a rapist knows that killing or bribing the victim won't stop the trial, because the state is moving forward regardless, the incentive to intimidate largely disappears. The target is moved from the back of a traumatised child and onto the shoulders of the state.

What is the true measure of a nation's progress? It is the safety of its women and children as well as other vulnerable communities. To ensure this, we cannot keep asking survivors to be heroes and fight the system alone. Given the present state of things, digitising all relevant aspects of the justice system can be a powerful tool in ensuring that violence against the powerless leads to real, unavoidable accountability.