

An alarming report on climate risks

Take steps to protect children from escalating climate hazards

In a country where children are regularly exposed to various physical, psychological and socioeconomic vulnerabilities, Unicef’s latest disclosure of their level of exposure to climate hazards is perhaps not instantly jarring. But it should be, not just because of the severity of the individual hazards, but also because of the way they are converging to produce a near-permanent state of risk for nearly every child growing up in the country. As reported by this daily, according to Unicef’s Children’s Climate Risk Report 2026, Bangladesh’s 59 million children are living through overlapping and compounding vulnerabilities, with nearly nine in ten, or around 53 million, facing three or more climate hazards simultaneously.

It goes without saying that this convergence has disproportionate effects for children, whose developing bodies are less equipped to cope with the hazards. The Unicef report, its most detailed assessment to date, examined children’s exposure to eight climate hazards: riverine flooding, coastal flooding, droughts, extreme heat, heatwaves, tropical storms, fires, and sand and dust storms. It also measured exposure to air pollution and vector-borne diseases, both of which are intensifying due to climate change. Thus, in the final analysis, Bangladesh ranked among the four worst countries out of 186 globally, alongside Myanmar, Pakistan and Vietnam. Let that sink in.

If we delve into the individual hazards, Bangladesh ranked among the worst countries for children’s exposure to riverine flooding and droughts, both agricultural and meteorological. It is also the third worst-ranked country for coastal flooding, air pollution, and tropical storms. The frequent occurrence of heat stress, air pollution, and waterborne diseases, as well as their health effects, are already well-known to the layperson. Displacement or disruptions caused by floods, droughts and/or storms further increase children’s vulnerabilities by hindering education, limiting access to nutrition, and compounding psychological stress. Their combined effects follow them throughout their lives.

The question is, what are we doing to prevent them? The absence of an instantly debilitating effect can sometimes lull policymakers into complacency, which seems to be the case at present. For instance, the recently proposed climate budget, while reflecting a continued commitment to adaptation measures with a notable increase in allocations, has again underscored the persistent gap between the scale of climate risks and the institutional readiness necessary to address them. It has also exposed how our climate resilience continues to be “subsidised” by the unpaid care work of women and girls, especially in coastal and other highly vulnerable areas. This response pattern does not reflect the sense of urgency needed to protect the most vulnerable among us, especially children, from the escalating hazards.

We, therefore, urge the government to take the Unicef report with the seriousness it deserves. While continuing to work with our global partners on the broader challenges of emissions reduction and adaptation finance, it must also adopt targeted and inclusive measures to ensure that children are not left to bear the costs of domestic structural weaknesses and policy failures.

Don’t build roads amid a forest

Find alternative routes that doesn’t wreck Baitarani Reserved Forest

A recent report on road construction through the Baitarani Reserved Forest in Chattogram’s Satkania upazila is deeply unsettling. The two roads are being built under the Local Government Engineering Department’s (LGED) IRIDP-3 project costing Tk 1.5 crore. If open to use, they would increase human movement in the forest, raising the risk of land encroachment, illegal tree felling, smuggling of forest resources, and perhaps most alarmingly, endangering the wildlife that depends on this habitat. The Forest Department’s intervention has temporarily suspended the construction work. However, we don’t understand why a project like this was approved in the first place. The work, which began around eight months ago and has been suspended for the past three months, has already resulted in several hillocks being cut, increasing the risk of landslides during the monsoon.

The LGED authorities cite the involvement of a local MP in expediting road work to better address the needs of the local population. However, the area reportedly has only a handful of houses, which raises the question as to whose interests the project is intended to serve. As the roads are being justified in the name of public interest, we urge the authorities to clearly explain how many people would stand to benefit from the construction, and why the alternative routes cannot meet the existing demand. Given that our forests are often treated as expendable for extractive projects despite protective laws, the authorities must exercise greater caution. We have observed this trend before. In Chattogram’s Tulatoli, for instance, we saw as many as 5,000 trees illegally felled in a five-acre mangrove forest to make room for a ship-breaking yard, without even considering the impact of removing these life-saving trees.

We routinely witness the normalisation of forest encroachments facilitated by influential locals, and sometimes even government projects contribute to the erosion of forest diversity. Our decreasing forestland has also contributed to rising human-wildlife conflict in many parts of the country. Therefore, any project that may compromise the integrity of forest ecosystems must be vetted with the utmost care, as forests serve as natural buffers against environmental hazards and extreme weather events, to which Bangladesh is becoming increasingly vulnerable.

We understand the importance of critical infrastructure in remote areas as we often see them bearing the brunt of insufficient transportation, education and healthcare services. However, a narrow view of development does more harm than good. We, therefore, urge the relevant authorities to re-evaluate the need for roads through the Baitarani Reserved Forest and to explore alternatives.

We can’t avoid the moral questions behind measles, Ad-din



BLOWIN’ IN THE WIND

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Reading a recent report by *The Daily Star* on the number of measles victims, I could not help but link the number “666” printed in red with something ominous. As someone who takes interest in popular imagination and is alert to the ongoing apocalyptic narrative, the number triggered something unnerving. The Book of Revelation assigns the number to the Beast, probably a coded way to describe Nero Caesar, who was known for persecuting Christians. The number got simplified in popular imagination through horror films and books to represent the Devil. When the combined death toll from confirmed and suspected measles-related fatalities in Bangladesh hit 666 on June 18, it symbolised not superstition but our collective neglect of human lives.

But who is the real devil here? The real beast is roaming outside the scriptures. It operates openly within our administrative practices. It is no secret that the interim government, despite warnings from Unicef, delayed the procurement of the vaccines that could have prevented the deaths of these children.

We pause at 666, not because the number is mystical. We pause because behind each number, there is a name, a face, a family. Behind each death there is a virus that is conditioned by our inefficiency, ignorance, and indifference. And the outcome is so monstrous that it exposes the vulnerability of our system that has stopped caring.

Our selective morality further contributes to this monstrosity. We are a country capable of instant outrage. We instantaneously react when the optics present us with a dog snatched by a crocodile or a rape victim’s body severed and brutalised by a pervers. But we fail to notice the pain of scattered deaths across wards in different hospitals. It seems only an image of

poiled up bodies would bring out the outrage the situation demands. The slow and incremental grief delivered through measured announcements results in routine probes, urging us to move on.

Should we be thankful that these 666 and growing numbers arrived without spectacle? The silent letters tell the tale of the quiet cruelty of preventable death. The measles outbreak is not only a public health emergency; it is a moral



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audit. Many of these children came from underprivileged backgrounds. How would we face them when the time comes? This moment seems to be the end of innocence.

The same question returns in another recent tragedy: the deaths of six newborns at Ad-din Medical College Hospital. A newborn is not in a position to cast a vote or lodge an accusation. It arrives with a sincere plea: protect me. Yet, the hospital administration failed to do so despite its Hippocratic Oath to curing with care. The tragedy demands proper investigation and

accountability. At the same time, it demands that we sift accountability from theatre.

The cancellation of a hospital licence may satisfy the public desire for visible punishment. The state’s actions create a headline that signals seriousness. But serious accountability is not merely the act of locking a door after children have died. It must ask harder questions to find out who was responsible and what exactly failed. What safeguards have been introduced so that the same tragedy is not repeated elsewhere? Punishment is necessary, but punishment without diagnosis can turn out to be a mere public ritual.

The Ad-din case also reveals another “monster” in our institutional closet. The pervasive desire to snap off heads in order to cure headaches is a troubling phenomenon. Too often have

can you teach medical students without hospital facilities? Foreign students, who have come to Bangladesh trusting our institutional promises, should not discover overnight that their education has become collateral damage in an administrative punishment. To say this is not to defend negligence but to demand intelligent accountability.

The measles outbreak and the Ad-din deaths share a similar moral landscape. In both cases, children died where protection should have been strongest. In both cases, the immediate grief is tied to bureaucratic motion. In both cases, we might find ourselves trapped in a cycle of announcement, blame, and forgetfulness. The repetitive nature of our experience eventually makes us comfortably numb. The shock effect of the first death soon wears off, and the human faces get masked by numbers and figures.

To penetrate the data and unearth the human faces buried behind the numbers, we must rethink our citizenship. We need to renew our commitments to our children. To protect them, we need more than politically correct rhetorical statements. We must identify the reasons for the failure of vaccination coverage. Instead of diluting the issue with blunt, spectacular punishments, we need precise actions.

We also need accountability that is both firm and fair. A hospital or an administrator cannot hide behind reputation or political connection when children die under its care. The public deserves transparent findings. Families deserve compensation and truth. Patients deserve continuity of care. Students deserve a viable educational pathway. The healthcare system deserves reform rather than episodic punishment. The challenge is to act before a crisis strikes.

By the time this column is read, the number “666” will have passed; it may already have changed. More children may be added to the count to remind us consistently of the monstrous decision that caused these deaths. The beast is the moral arithmetic by which a society learns to count dead children without changing the conditions that killed them. We don’t need an exorcist to annihilate this evil. We need vaccines, oxygen, accountability, and compassion to maintain our humanity.

Is the climate budget again built on an invisible gender ‘subsidy’?



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The allocation for climate action in the proposed budget for FY2026-27 deserves recognition. At a time when climate impacts are intensifying, Bangladesh has continued to institutionalise climate-responsive budgeting across ministries and expand allocations for adaptation. The proposed climate budget of around Tk 51,746 crore, more than 25 percent up from that in the outgoing fiscal year, signals sustained political commitment to climate action.

Bangladesh is among the world’s most climate-vulnerable countries, despite contributing less than one percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. The emphasis on adaptation is both necessary and justified. Nearly 75 percent of the allocation is directed towards adaptation measures, including flood control, embankments, climate-resilient agriculture, water management, and social protection. In this sense, the proposed allocation is clearly climate-sensitive.

However, the central question is whether it is climate-just. To answer this, we must move beyond how much is being spent and ask: who benefits from climate investments, who bears the costs of adaptation, and whose labour makes resilience possible?

The first concern is adequacy. Climate change is estimated to cost the country around \$3 billion annually, equivalent to roughly one to two percent of GDP, yet climate-related public expenditure has remained below one percent of GDP in recent years, including in the proposed budget. The gap becomes starker when

viewed against long-term needs.

The National Adaptation Plan (2023-2050) estimates that Bangladesh will require around \$230 billion for adaptation by 2050, or approximately \$8.5 billion annually. Current climate finance flows, however, remain around \$2.3 billion per year. Despite increases in allocations, a significant structural financing gap persists.

But adequacy is only part of the story. A more fundamental issue lies in how climate resilience is actually produced. Public discussions tend to focus on embankments, infrastructure, disaster systems, and renewable energy. These investments are essential, but they capture only a portion of what makes adaptation possible in practice.

A feminist analysis reveals a critical yet often invisible dimension: Bangladesh’s climate resilience is not sustained solely by public spending or international climate finance. It is also sustained by the unpaid and under-recognised labour of women and girls.

When floods contaminate drinking water sources, it is women who walk further distances to collect water. When cyclones destroy homes and livelihoods, and rising temperatures lead to health hazards, women take on the burden of caring for children, older family members and the sick, while simultaneously managing household recovery. When climate shocks threaten food security, women absorb the impact through longer working hours, reduced rest, and reduced personal consumption. But this rarely appears in climate budgets, adaptation

plans, or economic indicators.

In effect, the country’s climate resilience is subsidised by the unpaid care work of women and girls. It is a form of invisible subsidy that enables households and communities to withstand repeated climate shocks, but because it is not measured, it is not recognised in policy design. This has serious policy implications.

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Recognising care work is not simply a gender concern but a core adaptation issue. Proper investments in safe water systems, healthcare, childcare services, social protection, and climate-resilient public services can directly reduce unpaid care burdens while strengthening our adaptive capacity. These are not peripheral welfare interventions; they are central climate strategies.

Climate impacts also deepen existing gender inequalities. Displacement caused by floods, cyclones and river erosion increases women’s exposure to violence, exploitation, school dropout, and early marriage. Salinity intrusion and damaged sanitation systems create additional reproductive and menstrual health risks in many vulnerable regions.

These realities underscore the need to align climate budgeting more closely with Bangladesh’s own Climate Change Gender Action Plan (CCGAP) 2023, which calls for women’s leadership in climate governance, improved access to resources and technology, and stronger integration of gender equality across climate action.

There are three priorities here. First, strengthen gender-responsive climate budget tracking to assess not only how much is spent, but who benefits from climate expenditure. Second, scale up locally led adaptation and ensure dedicated support for women-led organisations working in climate-affected communities. And third, invest explicitly in reducing unpaid care burdens through improved access to water, healthcare, childcare and social protection in climate-affected areas.

Bangladesh has made important progress in climate budgeting. The next challenge is to ensure that climate finance not only builds embankments and infrastructure but also addresses the inequalities that determine who is most exposed to climate risk and who carries the greatest burden of adaptation. If climate justice requires recognising who suffers most from climate change, it must also require recognising who performs most of the work of adaptation. Until the contribution of millions of women and girls is recognised, measured, and reflected in climate policy and budgeting, the country’s climate resilience will continue to depend on an invisible subsidy.