The Daily Star
FOUNDER EDITOR: **LATE S. M. ALI**

BNP must enforce intra-party discipline

PM's warning is a wake-up call for the ruling party, affiliates

We welcome Prime Minister and BNP Chairman Tarique Rahman's warning against extortion and land-grabbing involving party leaders and activists. Speaking at a recent parliamentary party meeting, the ruling party chief also warned the party members against misconduct and instructed the MPs to prevent abuse of power. These warnings are timely considering several recent incidents where members of BNP and its affiliates were implicated. But warnings alone cannot restore public confidence. The party chief's warning should serve as a sobering wake-up call for the party leadership that their credibility is at stake.

The country's overall law and order situation has been on fragile grounds for a while. To the ruling party's embarrassment, its own rank and file have frequently been found embroiled in vandalism, violent clashes, assault of journalists, extortion and other crimes. The demolition and looting of the Radda MCH-FP Centre in Dhaka's Mirpur on September 25 draws a disturbing picture: more than 200 masked men reportedly entered the healthcare facility, looted medicines and equipment, and demolished buildings. Investigations and media reports implicated several individuals linked to local BNP politics, including expelled members and a sitting reserved-seat MP. So strong was their presence during the attack that even police refrained from intervening.

Meanwhile, allegations of extortion against its members have been haunting the ruling party. A police intelligence report prepared in March and April identified around 1,200 extortionists operating in areas under 45 police stations in Dhaka, many of whom are protected by influentials connected to BNP and its affiliates. More recently, a BNP ward-unit president in Dhaka was detained over extortion allegations on October 5, while a Jubo Dal leader was arrested in Munshiganj on October 6 over the alleged abduction and extortion of a marriage registrar.

The BNP must enforce strict internal discipline, remove criminal elements permanently from its ranks, and refuse to protect anyone merely because of their political standing.

The persistence of such allegations has clearly put a dent in the ruling party's standing where it counts most: among the people. Clearly, occasional expulsions or public reprimands have not solved this problem. The ruling party must also address the support system within the party that indulges such criminal elements. The leadership's recent directive against covering up allegations of criminal activity is a step in the right direction. Its implementation will be the real test. The BNP must enforce strict internal discipline, remove criminal elements permanently from its ranks, and refuse to protect anyone merely because of their political standing. Where credible evidence supports allegations, it must cooperate fully with law enforcement agencies and allow legal proceedings to take their course. And party leaders and lawmakers must stop using political clout to influence investigations, intimidate complainants or obstruct justice.

As the ruling party prepares for local government elections, it must get its members in order. It cannot expect to win public confidence in the polls if it continues to follow the old playbook of political patronage and intimidation. A party-wide reform must be a priority for the party leadership.

Girls must be able to play without fear

Female footballers and athletes deserve a safe playing environment

We are alarmed by the cancellation of a women's football match in Sunamganj because of objections and threats from a group of local residents. The match between Shopno Chura Sporting Club of Derai and Zara Sporting Club of Sylhet was supposed to take place on October 5 at Derai Upazila Stadium. The incident shows how some extremist groups continue to oppose women's participation in sports and try to impose their views on others. It is also concerning that the local administration and police failed to provide the support needed to hold the match. By giving in to such pressure, the authorities have undermined women's right to sports and failed to ensure equal opportunities for all.

The organisers were forced to cancel the match shortly before kick-off after some residents objected to women playing football, describing the game as "indecent". The group reportedly approached the upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) to demand that the match be stopped, and later returned to press their demand. The organisers said they contacted the police but were advised to suspend the match. Such responses from the authorities only reward intimidation and allow opponents of women's participation in public life to dictate their choices. Similar disruptions occurred in Joypurhat and Dinajpur in January 2025 by groups who opposed female athletes taking the field. Must women and girls defend their right to play sports every time someone objects?

These incidents come at a time when women's football has become a source of national pride, with players from remote areas contributing significantly to the country's achievements. When even the government encourages girls to take part in sports through various initiatives, local authorities appear unable to protect them from those seeking to obstruct their participation. Encouraging girls to play sports means little if they cannot do so without fear. The girls of Shopno Chura Sporting Club have played football since 2019, travelling to Dhaka and elsewhere for matches and competing in national-level tournaments. Their commitment deserves support, not humiliation or intimidation.

The government must act now to ensure that the match is held with adequate security, and that those who threatened the organisers are identified and held accountable. The Sunamganj administration and police must also explain why they failed to ensure that the match would take place. Sporting bodies, local representatives and community leaders should also speak out against attempts to restrict women's participation in sports. If necessary, the government should also examine whether stronger legal safeguards are required to prevent such obstruction of women's sporting events.

Why do we keep starting from scratch in policymaking?



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■ **SYED ABDUL HAMID**

Over the past five and a half decades, Bangladesh has made remarkable progress. Its economy has grown, infrastructure has expanded, and it has achieved significant gains in education, health, and other social indicators. Yet, one critical aspect of governance remains underdeveloped: our capacity to formulate, implement, evaluate and improve public policies through strong institutions and consistent leadership.

In policymaking, we seem to have spent 55 years struggling to move beyond Class 1. This is not to dismiss the country's achievements or the capabilities of its people. Rather, it reflects a persistent weakness in how we manage knowledge, develop institutional expertise and ensure continuity in public administration.

Bangladesh has no shortage of talented officials, professionals or researchers. The problem is that relevant expertise is not always given sufficient weight when people are appointed to key policymaking positions. Nor do officials always have enough time to understand their sectors and translate that knowledge into meaningful reforms. When someone assumes a senior position without adequate experience in the relevant field, valuable time must be spent learning the sector's institutions, challenges, policies, and past initiatives. The result is that the time available for reform and implementation is often consumed by the need to learn the basics.

Consider the health sector. A senior official must understand not only the administrative structure of the health ministry but also health financing, medicine supply chains, human resources, hospital management, primary healthcare, health insurance, and public procurement. Equally important is understanding why previous policies were adopted, what they achieved and where they failed. Similar complexities exist in education, agriculture, finance and social protection.

The problem deepens when an official finally develops the necessary understanding and experience but is transferred, reassigned or retired before meaningful reforms can take root. A successor arrives and begins the learning process anew. By the time that person becomes familiar with the sector, another change may occur. Individuals repeatedly learn, but institutions fail to accumulate knowledge.

Consider a long-term health financing reform. Establishing a new financing system requires decisions on revenue sources, fund management, benefit packages, provider payments, hospital readiness, information systems and accountability. The model must then be tested, evaluated and adjusted before being scaled up. Frequent leadership changes can disrupt this process, encourage shifting priorities, and leave reforms unfinished. New initiatives may be launched before earlier ones have been properly evaluated.

The same risk applies to infrastructure, education, agriculture, urban management and digital transformation. A digital public service, for example, requires more than software. It needs instructional development, reliable data, coordination across agencies, adequate funding, skilled personnel, information security and long-term maintenance. If every change in leadership introduces a new platform or approach, public resources may be wasted on overlapping systems and repeated investments.

Good policymaking is not a one-time decision; it is a continuous cycle of learning and improvement. Problems must be identified, evidence collected and analysed, stakeholders consulted, alternatives assessed, and financial and administrative feasibility examined. Policies must then be implemented, evaluated and revised in light of the results. The cycle is straightforward: learn, analyse, decide, implement, evaluate and improve.

When this cycle breaks down, policies may be poorly designed, implementation may begin without adequate preparation, and promising initiatives may lose momentum after leadership changes. We repeatedly form committees, commission reports, prepare action plans and organise workshops, yet the desired results often remain elusive. The weakness is not necessarily our ability to identify problems; it is our failure to consistently translate findings into action, measure outcomes and learn from experience.

Institutional memory is therefore a critical public asset. When an official or expert leaves, the knowledge accumulated during their tenure should remain within the institution. This requires systematic documentation of policy decisions, accessible records of research and consultations, regular performance reviews and effective handover arrangements. It also requires recognising specialised knowledge and professional experience when assigning responsibilities.



VISUAL: **SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR**

The challenge, however, is broader than frequent transfers. Continuity alone cannot guarantee good policymaking if decisions are driven by personal preferences rather than evidence, or if institutions lack accountability. What matters is a system that combines appropriate expertise, reasonable continuity, transparent decision-making and institutional learning.

Several reforms could help Bangladesh move to the next grade. First, appointments to key policymaking positions should place greater weight on relevant sectoral knowledge, professional competence, and experience. Unnecessary transfers should be reduced, and reasonable minimum tenures ensured, while accountability for performance is retained.

Second, every major policy should have a documented institutional record covering its rationale, supporting evidence, stakeholder consultations, implementation progress, challenges, and future priorities. Such records would allow successors to build on previous work rather than start from scratch. Third, major policy decisions should be preceded by systematic assessments of costs, benefits, alternatives, and risks. Implementation should be followed by regular evaluation against measurable outcomes, with revisions made when evidence warrants them.

Fourth, coordination among ministries and agencies must improve. Universities, research institutions, professional bodies and independent experts should contribute more meaningfully to policy development and evaluation. Reliable data systems and mechanisms for sharing evidence must support this collaboration.

Ultimately, the question is not simply who occupies a particular position. It is whether our institutions can learn, preserve knowledge and apply lessons to future decisions. National development depends not only on roads, bridges, buildings and technology but also on the quality of the institutions that plan, manage and sustain them.

Bangladesh's achievements over the past 55 years deserve recognition. The next phase of development must also strengthen the institutions responsible for shaping the country's future. We must stop repeatedly returning to the lessons of Class 1 and move to the next grade, where institutions, not individuals, preserve knowledge, continuity strengthens policy, and evidence guides decisions.

Otherwise, another 55 years from now, we may still be asking: have we finally moved from Class 1 to Class 2 in policymaking?

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Prepare for disasters before they strike



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■ **MOHAMMAD ABU TOYAB**

The theme for International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction this year—"Resilience Starts at Home"—resonates with profound optimism and practical hope for our nation. For millions of households across our delta, from the coastal stretches of the south to the hillside communities of Chattogram, home signifies not merely a physical shelter, but the fundamental foundation of life, dignity, and economic survival. Over the decades, Bangladesh has built an internationally recognised legacy of saving lives through robust community volunteer networks, extensive cyclone shelters, and reliable early warning systems. As we celebrate these remarkable achievements, we stand at an exciting threshold: transforming our disaster management paradigm from reactive recovery to proactive, household-centred resilience by Forecast-based Financing (FbF) or anticipatory action (AA).

Building resilience at the household level requires us to rethink our historical financial and operational practices. Historically, our disaster response mechanisms have been heavily weighted towards post-disaster relief and reconstruction. Between 2000 and 2023 alone, extreme weather events cost Bangladesh over $13.6 billion and affected more than 13 crore people. The urgency of shifting this balance was underlined again during the July 2026 flash floods, which affected over 12.8 lakh people across Bangladesh, destroying or damaging tens of thousands of homes, causing an estimated $17.3 million in livestock and fisheries losses, and forcing thousands into evacuation shelters.

While post-event aid remains critical, waiting until damage occurs places an immense strain on family budgets and national resources. Operationalising the National Strategy for Disaster Risk Financing 2025 and expanding dedicated disaster management funds at national, district, and upazila levels are vital steps forward. However, generating sustainable domestic funds for disaster management requires moving beyond routine budgetary allocations. Crucially, connecting local funds to global mechanisms like the Green Climate Fund (GCF) can bridge the adaptation financing gap—enabling pre-arranged financing and pre-emptive investments that protect homes, assets, and livelihoods long before floodwaters rise or storm surges breach our dykes.

Nature provides our most effective and sustainable shield for protecting homes and local communities. Across the country, nature-based solutions (NbS) offer practical, community-driven protection that complements hard engineering infrastructure. Coastal mangrove restoration dampens storm surges and prevents shoreline erosion, directly protecting coastal homesteads. In the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), bio-engineering approaches—such as planting deep-rooting vetiver grass and Indigenous vegetation—bind fragile hillsides, preventing devastating monsoon landslides and keeping families safe in their homes. Furthermore, the government's nationwide tree-plantation initiatives demonstrate how Ecosystem-based Disaster Risk Reduction (Eco-DRR) can be operationalised on a massive scale. Beyond sequestering carbon, large-scale tree planting stabilises riverbanks, reduces urban heat stress, improves soil integrity, and safeguards residential areas. Strengthening these initiatives requires systematically integrating green infrastructure into local upazila disaster management plans, urban settlement guidelines, and community maintenance frameworks.

Anticipatory action acts as the vital bridge that connects early warning indicators with household-level protection across all three phases of the disaster cycle. Far from being a standalone tool, AA ensures that resilience can begin at home before, during, and after a crisis. In the pre-disaster phase, it supports mitigation and preparedness by funding community nurseries, establishing bio-engineering green buffers on vulnerable slopes, and building local capacity. During the inter-disaster phase—the crucial window between a forecast trigger and impact—it releases pre-arranged financing to deliver unconditional cash transfers directly via mobile phones, helping families to fortify their dwellings, secure livestock, store clean water, and protect essential documents. Evidence shows that every $1 invested in AA can yield up to $7 in avoided losses and humanitarian savings. In the post-disaster phase, anticipatory frameworks guide eco-restoration and sustainable recovery, helping communities build greener buffers and restore local natural assets.

As we mark International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction, Bangladesh's path forward lies in championing a proactive, nature-rooted framework that puts families and communities at the centre. By combining high-resolution forecasting from the Bangladesh Meteorological Department and the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (under the Bangladesh Water Development Board) with pre-arranged disaster financing and nature-based solutions, we can ensure that every household across the country is empowered to withstand climatic shocks. True disaster management is not measured by how effectively we clean up after a disaster, but by how well we can safeguard our homes, ecosystems, and our people before the storm arrives.

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